

Centipede Lawn Quick Care Guide

Willie O. Chance, III , Retired UGA Extension Agent, Houston County

Contact your local Georgia Extension Office – 800-ASK-UGA1

Centipede is a low-growing, light green lawn grass for South and Middle Georgia. It prefers low fertility, deep and infrequent watering and low mowing heights. Though relatively pest free, it will winter kill or turn yellow and die if not properly cared for. If we care for it like we care for other lawn grasses, we may damage it severely.

MOWING: Height is very important. **Centipede lawns must be mowed one to one and three-quarter inches high or they tend to die in the winter or during other stresses.** Mow slightly higher in the summer and cut often enough so that you are only removing one-third of the blade at each mowing. Keep mower blades sharp for the highest quality lawn. **Do not mow centipede lawns higher than one and three-quarter inches high!**

FERTILIZATION: The main rule is, **do not over-fertilize!**

For homeowners: Fertilize no more than twice a year (May and July) with one of the following or a similar fertilizer. Do not fertilize before May 1 or after August 31. Do not lime centipede lawns unless a soil sample recommends lime. Liming or fertilizing a centipede lawn too much can damage it.

| Examples of fertilizers | Pounds per 1,000 square feet | Pounds per acre |
|-------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| 12-4-8, 16-4-8, 15-0-15 | 4 | 175 |
| 18-0-18 | 3 | 135 |

Concerning lawn service companies: Lawn care companies often fertilize more often than twice a year. This is usually fine because they apply fertilizer in small doses throughout the growing season. Lawn service companies should apply a total of no more than two pounds of nitrogen a year per 1,000 square feet. A total of one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet split between at least two applications is probably better than applying all the fertilizer at one time.

Remember that no centipede lawn ever died from lack of fertilizer. Many centipede lawns are damaged by too much fertilizer. Centipede has a natural yellow-green color. It should not be fertilized to keep it dark green and thick and lush all the time. If a centipede lawn is thick and lush, then you can probably expect problems later.

An application of iron will often green up a centipede lawn without causing the problems associated with over fertilization. The grass may turn black if we apply too much iron. The lawn should recover over time if this happens. Liquid iron products tend to act more quickly while granular iron products may last longer. If the soil pH is too high, expect to have recurring iron deficiency problems.

WATERING: *This may be the most important step.* Wait until the lawn gets dry to water. The turf will begin to look grey and wilted. Foot steps will remain in it after being walked on. This will probably mean watering about every 5 to 7 days in the summer if we have no rain.

A sample watering program: Water three quarters to one inch every 5 days or so or one-half to three-quarters inch twice a week. Do not apply less water than this and do not water too often (every other day or every day) since this encourages shallow roots and leads to weak roots and lawn decline.

How can you know how much water your sprinkler applies? Put a pie pan or tuna can in the lawn and run the system through a cycle. Then see how much water the system puts out. Adjust the timer to apply the amount and the timing mentioned above. Some special situations, like newly established grass, may require more often watering - but these should be uncommon.

Centipede is very susceptible to drought. I like to say that centipede does not grow on fertilizer, it grows on water. A centipede lawn may grow well without fertilizer, but not as well without water. Carefully follow these watering practices for a healthy centipede lawn. This is especially important as the lawn is greening up or if the lawn has been damaged.

SOIL COMPACTION: Many people aerate without knowing if they need to. Take a small rod or trowel and try to sink it into the ground. If the rod or trowel cannot go at least 4 to 6 inches into the turf fairly easily, you may have a soil compaction problem.

Use a core aerator to pull plugs out of the lawn to reduce compaction. Core aerate as deeply as you can. Core aerate when the soil is moist and cover about 15% of the soil surface with holes. Leave the holes open. Do not fill them with soil or sand.

Aerate lawns from May through early July. Aerating will not cure a soil compaction problem but should help the lawn to cope.

If an area of turf growing in compacted soil must be replaced, till the area before you replace the turf. Tilling is probably the best solution to soil compaction. Do not till under the limbs of trees or remove tree roots larger than a pencil when tilling. This can harm your trees and create problems you cannot solve without removing the tree. Remember that trees are harder to replace than turf. Consider using mulched beds under the canopy of trees and reserve turf for the more open areas.

For more information:

Call your local UGA Extension Agent at (800) ASK-UGA1 or locate your local Extension Office at <http://www.caes.uga.edu/extension/statewide.cfm>

Find UGA publications here - <http://extension.uga.edu/publications/>

Centipede Lawns - <http://tinyurl.com/d8keqr5>

Centipede Decline - <http://tinyurl.com/83t7cn4>

Lawns in Georgia - <http://tinyurl.com/bmwo3wl>

Georgia turf information - www.georgiaturf.com

Pest Management Handbook (Follow all label recommendations when using any pesticide) - www.ent.uga.edu/pmh/

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