

# April Showers Bring More than Flowers

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April showers bring May flowers and also your lawn coming back in. In order for your lawn to get back to its lush, green, full potential you most likely will want to apply a fertilizer. With so many different options you may be asking yourself, “What product do I choose?” and “How often do I use it?”

The first three numbers on a fertilizer bag are the percent of nitrogen (N), critical to plant growth and development; phosphorus (P), important for quality flowers and root growth; and potassium (K), important to produce quality fruit. Of the three elements, nitrogen is likely what your lawn is lacking, so focus on the first number on the fertilizer bag. The larger the number, the more nitrogen there is. Nitrogen largely controls both plant green-up and growth; you have probably noticed that the greener your lawn, the faster it grows.

Calculating the cost per pound of nitrogen provides a comparison between products on the shelf. If N is 20 percent, for example, a 10-pound bag of fertilizer would contain 2 pounds of nitrogen. An amount often recommended is 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn area. If you think of fertilizing your lawn on the seasonal holidays, you won't be far off as to when you should apply fertilizer. These include Easter, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day and Columbus Day.

Lawn color is not only affected by the amount of nitrogen fertilizer applied, but also by the type and variety of grass that is planted. Kentucky bluegrass is often mixed with rye and fescue to create a blend used for lawns, with the bluegrass helping to give the lawn a dark green appearance.

Kentucky bluegrass seed grown in Central Oregon is used for the turf of home lawns and in landscape areas throughout the temperate regions of the United States and around the world. Production of Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) seed began in Central Oregon during the 1950's with Merion bluegrass, followed by a number of different varieties grown over the years. Kentucky bluegrass is also included in pasture mixes, particularly in the eastern United States.

Kentucky bluegrass seed is grown under irrigation in the Madras and Culver areas of Central Oregon and is planted from mid to late August. The dry, warm summers of Central Oregon provide excellent conditions for grass seed harvest, which begins the first part of July. The grass is first swathed into windrows and laid to dry in the windrows from 7-10 days. Swathing too early can stop the seeds from reaching full maturity and swathing too late can cause the seeds to shatter. Once the windrows have reached the correct moisture content they are ran through a combine which thrashes the seed from the stalks. Generally farmers will bale the leftover stalks and sell as grass hay. The combined seed is then taken by truckloads to the local seed contractor for additional cleaning. Kentucky bluegrass has a cotton/lint on the seeds that has to be removed during the cleaning process.

Oregon State University administers a seed certification program for some grass seeds fields that ensures quality seed production and cleaning. Field inspections are conducted in the spring and seed samples are taken after the seed has been cleaned to verify that the growing and processing procedures maintain and protect the genetic identity of each specific grass variety. Fields that participate in the seed certification program can only be planted with registered or foundation seed. A large amount of Kentucky bluegrass produced in central Oregon is grown under the seed certification program.

Almost 4000 acres of Kentucky bluegrass was planted and harvested in 2013, averaging 1,040 pounds an acre, grossing \$4,553,120. For more information on Kentucky bluegrass or to see where some fields are planted locally, visit: [www.jeffcoseed.com](http://www.jeffcoseed.com).