

Virginia Cooperative Extension - Prince William Unit

B.E.S.T Lawns News

Building Environmentally Sustainable Turf for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

8033 Ashton Avenue, Suite 105, Manassas, VA 20109 | Phone: 703-792-6285



At the Virginia Cooperative Extension - Prince William office, another year of BEST lawn evaluations has come to an end. I want to thank every resident and volunteer who enrolled in the BEST Lawns Program in

2023 for your commitment and dedication to protecting our local waterways from excess nutrient pollution. Now that the weather is colder and the days are shorter, it's time to start planning for 2024. We have some exciting programs and changes coming up, so stay tuned.

Respectfully,
Elesha Young
BEST Lawns Coordinator/Environmental Educator

Staff Contacts:

Thomas Bolles

Associate Extension Agent
703-792-4764 | tbolles@pwcgov.org

Valerie Huelsman

Natural Resource Specialist/
Master Gardener Coordinator
703-792-7913 | vhuelsman1@pwcgov.org

Elesha Young

Environmental Educator/
BEST Lawns Coordinator
703-792-4037 | eyoung1@pwcgov.org

Christina Hastings

Administrative Assistant
703-792-6285 |
chastings@pwcgov.org



Follow us on social media!

In This Issue:

- 2 **Winter Weather and Your Turf**
- 3 **Turf Myths vs. Facts**
- 4 **What is Nimblewill?**
- 6 **Events**

Connect with Us

bestlawns@pwcgov.org[@VCEMGPW](https://www.facebook.com/VCEMGPW)[@mastergardenerspwc](https://www.instagram.com/mastergardenerspwc)[@vce-princewilliam4823](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCe-princewilliam4823)

**Extension
Master
Gardeners**

Horticulture Help Desk

Master Gardener Volunteers are available to answer your questions.

**In Person: Monday through Friday
from 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM**

By Phone: 703-792-7747

**Via Email:
mastergardener@pwcgov.org**

All content was written by Elesha Young, except where noted, and is based on University research at Virginia Tech, Virginia State, and other partner universities in the Land Grant System.

Virginia Cooperative Extension is a partnership of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and local governments. Its programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, military status, or any other basis protected by law.

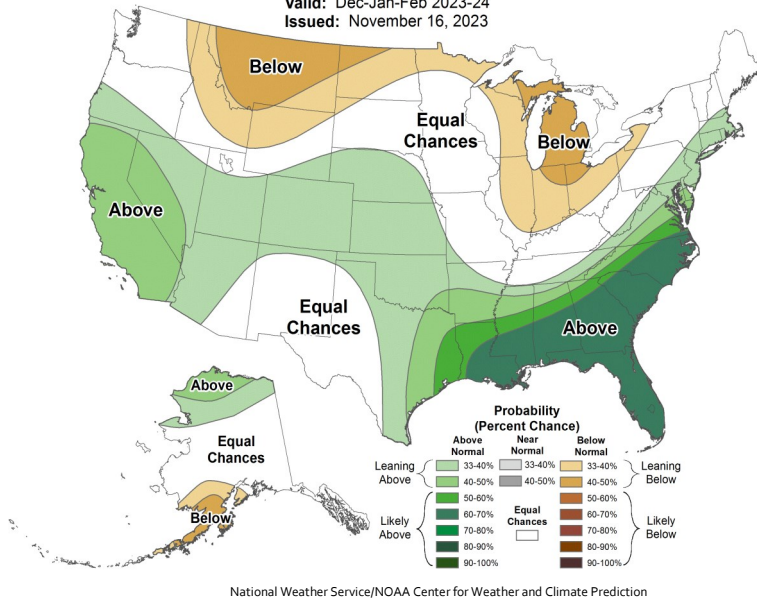
Disclaimer: Commercial products are named in this publication for informational purposes only. Virginia Cooperative Extension does not endorse these products and does not intend discrimination against other products which also may be suitable.



Seasonal Precipitation Outlook



Valid: Dec-Jan-Feb 2023-24
Issued: November 16, 2023



Snow Molds

Turf is susceptible to the snow molds: gray snow mold and pink snow mold. The symptoms are typically visible towards the end of winter. Affected turf has a matted, crusty appearance. Over fertilization, poor drainage, excessive shade, excessive thatch, and snow or leaves sitting on turf for long periods can contribute to these diseases. Excessively high turf is also prone to snow molds, so remember to keep mowing as long as the grass is growing in the fall. Snow mold is rarely fatal to turf in our area. Most turf will bounce back when the warmer temperatures of spring stimulate turf growth.



Gray snow mold on turf. Photo: Peter Landschoot, Penn State

Voles

The eastern meadow vole, sometimes called the field mouse or meadow mouse, may frequent surface pathways also known as “runways” in your turf to avoid predation by birds of prey. These runs lead to small entrance holes for underground runways or nesting areas. Snow may increase the amount of runways since they provide excellent protection. Make your lawn less inviting to voles by moving woodpiles and sources of cover away from your lawn. Making the last cut of your lawn a little shorter will discourage vole activity.

Winter Weather and Your Turf

Although spring is just around the corner, your turf grass is currently dormant and we are still experiencing freezing nighttime temperatures. A winter storm is also possible through March due to the El Niño. While your lawn rests, there are a few things to be mindful of that may result in [winterkill](#). Winterkill can be caused by a combination of factors including low temperatures, ice sheets, and snow mold.

Stay Off The Grass!

Frosted grass means the water inside the plant tissue are frozen. Walking on frozen grass can cause ice crystals in the cells to rupture cell walls. When the ground has been frozen for some time and then a warm day comes along, it can cause partial thawing in the first inch of soil. Walking on the grass in this stage can shear roots from the crown. Warmer days followed by refreezing temperatures results in cell wall rupture and crown hydration issues. If experiencing a cold, dry winter, the crowns can lose more water than they gain, which may cause death.

Winter Recovery

Have your lawn assessed for recovery potential. Seeding or sodding may be necessary to facilitate recovery. Avoid any preemergence crabgrass herbicides until the extent of damage has been determined. Managing the height of your turf and depth of your mulch will reduce problems from pests. Providing proper fertilization in the fall will help keep turf strong and resilient. While both cool and warm seasons can suffer winter damage, if the grass is healthy, the damage is usually more cosmetic than catastrophic.

TURF MYTHS VS FACTS



Myth # 1:

Spring is the best time to start a new lawn program.

Spring is the second best time for cool season seeding and fertilizing. The optimal time is late summer through early fall. Cooler temperatures and shorter days provide ideal conditions for root growth.

[Learn more](#)

Myth # 2:

I need to apply a grub control annually.

Ensure that the problem is due to grubs. Grubs can be a sign of healthy soil. Verify that populations are significant enough to warrant using chemical control (10 grubs per square foot).

[Learn more](#)

Myth # 3:

All fertilizers are good for your grass.

Remember to soil test before applying to learn what nutrients, if anything, it may need. Over applying a nutrient that is not needed may have negative effects on your lawn and in the surrounding watersheds.

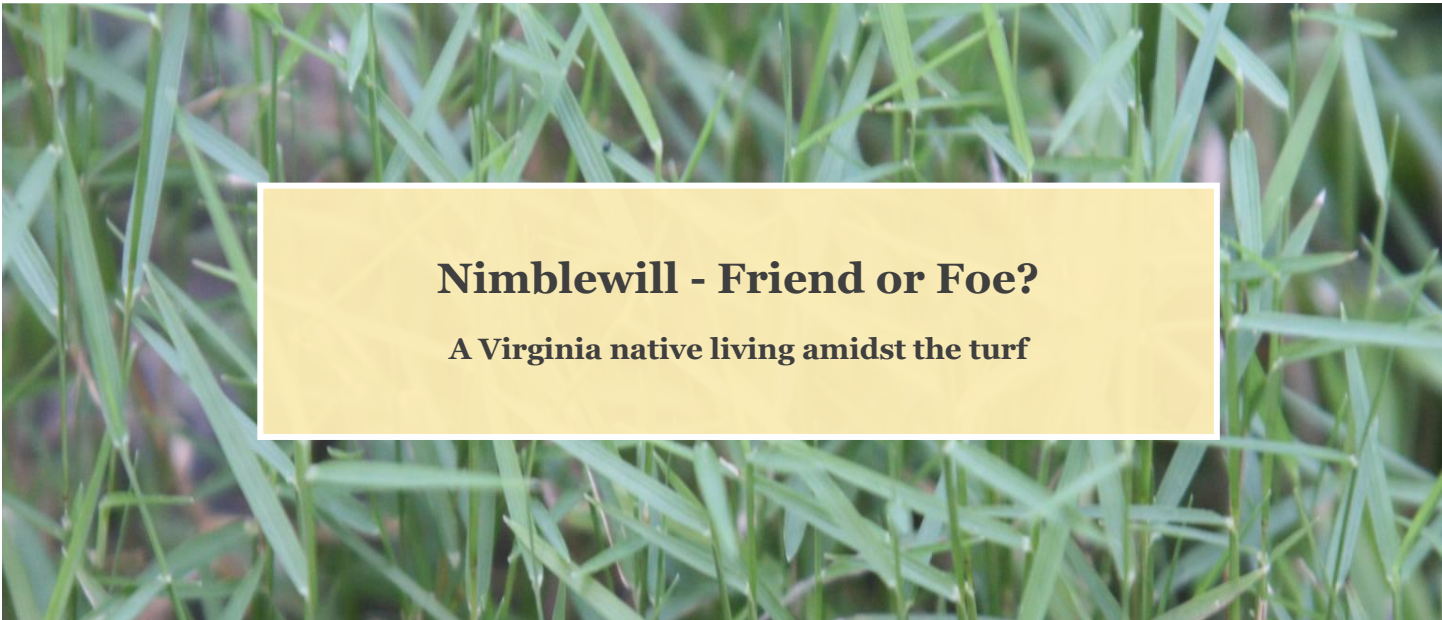
[Learn more](#)



If it has been more than four years since your last soil test, the Virginia Tech Soils Laboratory can help. For \$10.00, the Soils Lab will conduct a routine soil test to analyze your soil sample for plant nutrients plus soil pH and fertilizer/lime recommendations.

The BEST Lawns program through Virginia Cooperative Extension continues to provide residents a site visit from a Master Gardener and a detailed Nutrient Management Plan that is customized to your property for a \$40 fee.

[Download the BEST Lawns Application here](#)



Nimblewill - Friend or Foe?

A Virginia native living amidst the turf

Nimblewill (*Muhlenbergia schreberi*) is a warm-season, mat forming native perennial grass. Many consider it a turfgrass weed since it goes dormant in the winter and is slow to green up. Rather than removing it, it may be worth encouraging its growth due to its ability to thrive in shade and moisture and outcompete other nuisance weeds during the summer.

[Learn more](#)



Dormant nimblewill growing in cool season grass

© Aaron J. Patton



Patches of nimblewill growing in cool season grass

Photo: Peter Landschoot, Penn State

Weed identification

Brush up on your weed identification skills before they start showing up. Start by using the [Virginia Tech Weed Identification App](#).

Have an unknown sample? Stop by our office and we can help identify or submit samples to the Virginia Tech Weed Identification Clinic.

[Learn more](#)

Have you considered using Traction Materials?



SAND



BIRD SEED
(NATIVE BLEND)



WOOD ASH



ZEOLITE CRYSTALS



**PRINCE
WILLIAM**
— Public Works

Protect your pet from
harmful chemicals in
salt-based snow melts.

#WINTERSALTSMART



8850 Rixlew Lane, Manassas, VA 20109
pwsxcd@pwsxcd.org | 571-379-7514



The Virginia Conservation Assistance Program (VCAP) is a program that helps HOAs, individual homeowners, schools, places of worship, and other communities with urban soil erosion and water runoff. Visit pwsxcd.org/vcap for more information.

Upcoming Winter/Spring Events

**10
FEB**

6th Annual Prince William Native Plant Symposium 9 a.m.–4 p.m. - George Mason University Science and Technology Campus, Manassas

Stop mowing, start growing! A native plant symposium for beginners and beyond. Learn to create a beautiful yard, save time and money, improve water quality, and build habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. Attend virtually or in person. [Registration required.](#)

**17
FEB**

How to Design a Native Plant Garden (That Your Neighbors Won't Complain About) 11 a.m.–1 p.m. - Central Library, Manassas

By knowing a plant's growing requirements and habits, home gardeners can use psychology and basic garden design principles to create attractive native plant gardens that the neighbors won't complain about.

**6
MAR**

Virginia Snake Talk and Overview - Winter Lecture Series - 10 a.m. - Bull Run Mountains Conservancy, Broad Run

Learn to identify and safely handle Northern Virginia's native snakes and discover their ecological importance. Participants will have the opportunity to interact with live snakes and learn about intervention and sustainable practices to deter them from entering homes and yards. Demos will include snake removal from sticky traps and an overview of field equipment. More information [here.](#)

**30
MAR**

Houseplant and Cuttings Swap - 11 a.m.–3 p.m. - Potomac Library, Woodbridge

Looking for some new plants or trying to get rid of the plants you currently have? Bring pest-free plants or clippings and take some back! Master Gardeners will also be available to diagnose common houseplant issues.

2024 Virginia Household Water Quality Program

Prince William Drinking Water Clinic

Wednesday March 27, 2024



**Preregistration opening soon - check [here](#) for updates.
Preregistration and attendance to a Kick-Off meeting prior to sample drop off is required.**

Saturday in the Garden

April - October

Classes are generally held at the Teaching Garden in Bristow the first Saturday of the month. Visit the [Horticultural Classes](#) page for the latest schedules and registration information.

Wednesday Zoom Classes

New classes are being scheduled for the coming months. Check out recordings of previous Wednesday Zoom classes on our YouTube channel.

Virginia Cooperative Extension complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services, or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Christina Hastings, Virginia Cooperative Extension-Prince William at 703.792.6285/TDD during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event. *TDD number is (800) 828-1120.*