

## Kentucky bluegrass

*Poa pratensis*

### Identification:

**Poaceae (Grass family)**

**Abundant** Perennial graminoid

**Height:** 4-18"

**Width:** ∞

**Leaf Arrangement:** alternate

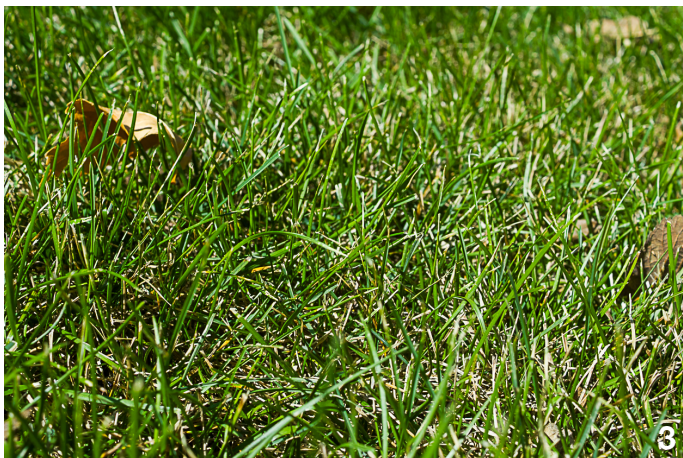
**Flower:** Green

**Blooms:** Late spring to Early summer

**Fruit:** Grain

**Fall Color:** Green

Though most people see this plant just about every day, few people look at it closely. Since there are often other non-native species of grasses in lawns, such as fescue, a few distinct features can help you tell Kentucky bluegrass apart when necessary. When not mown off, the leaf tips look like the front end or “bow” of a boat. Only grasses in the genus *Poa* have this feature. Leaf blades are always less than 1/8” wide. Also, when Kentucky bluegrass is not mown it will develop a distinctive panicle of small, green, wind-pollinated flowers.



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*Poa pratensis*

### AKA:



### Description & Impact:

Originally from Europe (not Kentucky), this plant is the primary component of most lawns. Aside from corn, this may now be the most common grass in the eastern United States due to its dominance of our human landscape. This species often escapes cultivation and can be a problematic invasive species in our natural areas. It is particularly problematic in prairie plantings, especially those with lawns around the margins or mowed paths within the prairie. In these planted prairies it can take up considerable growing space and push-out native grasses and wildflowers. That said, Kentucky bluegrass spread so aggressively it can be found in most natural areas, in fact it is found even in our best quality remnant prairies, woodlands and wetlands.

Lawns as a whole have significant ecological impacts. Irrigating lawns uses up to 30% of municipal water supplies; this waste puts our long term supply of clean fresh water at risk. Pesticides, herbicides and petrochemical fertilizers are spread on lawns at ten times the rate they are applied to agricultural lands. As a result, lawns are the primary source of pollution in lakes, streams and groundwater in urban and suburban areas. Exhaust from mowers and trimmers cause up to 33% of air pollution in urban areas. Lastly, these low mown lawns provide no habitat for our native wildlife, and as a result urban development is a leading cause of habitat loss.

### Control Methods:

**Herbicide:** Kentucky bluegrass can be killed effectively by glyphosate. A foliar spray of this chemical this is the best choice when patches of this species have formed a monoculture, or if you can time your application in early to mid spring before native species emerge. Another time of year for herbicide application to exotic grasses like Kentucky bluegrass is mid to late fall when these grasses are green and actively growing but most native plants have gone dormant. If you are concerned about harming native broadleaf plants, a grass-specific herbicide such as sethoxydim (Poast®, Vantage®) or clethodim (Intensity®) can be used.

Always read herbicide labels carefully before use and always apply herbicide according to the product label.

**Prescribed Fire:** Kentucky bluegrass greens-up early in the spring, So burning in mid to late spring can negatively impact this species at a time of year when it is low on root carbohydrate reserves. This will not kill the Kentucky bluegrass outright, but it will weaken it and reduce its competitiveness, giving an advantage to native species.

**Manual:** Small patches can be hand-weeded, however bear in mind that the roots form widely spreading Rhizomes. So as you dig the plant you need to gently trace and extract the roots as-well. Be ready to

**Killing Lawn:** A foliar application of a glyphosate-based herbicide (Round-Up®, etc.) is the least labor intensive way to kill lawn grasses and does not cause soil disturbance. Then wait 2-4 weeks before begin planting.

Smothering is an effective way to kill lawn and prepare an area for a planting bed. First mow the grass in this area as low as possible. Then lay down newsprint, 6-10 sheets thick, or a single layer of cardboard. If you use newspaper you will need to wet it down in order to prevent it from blowing away while you are working. Lastly, cover the area with 4" - 6" of mulch. Allow 6-8 weeks for the grass underneath to be killed before you begin planting.

Alternately, you can remove the sod itself. For small areas use a flat-bladed shovel, or a manual sod stripper. Renting a power sod stripper will make larger jobs much easier. Once the sod is removed you should plant the area immediately.

### Citations: