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### Murphy's Law

Dr. James Murphy is an Associate Extension Specialist in Turfgrass Management for Rutgers, department of Plant science. Ask Dr. Murphy your questions: E-mail us at [sfmanjchapter@netscape.net](mailto:sfmanjchapter@netscape.net)

#### Question:

The baseball fields I maintain are perennial ryegrass, Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue. Typically around mid October, when the grass starts slowing down I lower the height from 2 1/2

to 2 inches for the last few mowings and fertilize with 1 to 1 1/2 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. I have heard this will push lateral growth. Is the practice of mowing the turf shorter for the winter a good practice or should I let the turf gain some length for the winter?

#### Answer:

This is an excellent question. Growth during the fall and winter is different from growth in the spring and summer because plant growth habits are affected by daylength. Turfgrass growth responses to short daylength (fall and winter) include increased shoot density, tillering, and leaf appearance rate, whereas leaf, shoot, and internode length is reduced. Thus, the net effect on turf growth is a more prostrate, compact, and spreading growth habit. Management practices that will enhance these effects include lowering the cutting height (within the tolerance range for the specific turf species) and appropriated fertilization particularly nitrogen fertilization. Fertilization with phosphorus and potassium will also be beneficial if a soil test indicates these nutrients are below optimum in the soil. Soil testing is available through a number of commercial test laboratories as well as the Rutgers Soil Testing Laboratory (P.O. Box 902, Milltown, NJ 08850. Telephone: 732/932-9295)

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