



A Guide to Choosing the Right Lawn for Your Melbourne Garden

Choosing the perfect lawn for your Melbourne garden can significantly impact its overall aesthetic and functionality. With Melbourne's diverse climate, selecting a grass variety that thrives in local conditions is crucial. This guide will help you navigate the options and make an informed decision for a beautiful and sustainable lawn.

Understanding Melbourne's Climate

Melbourne experiences a temperate climate with hot, dry summers and cool to cold, wet winters. This means your chosen lawn needs to be resilient to both heat and frost, and adaptable to periods of drought or heavy rainfall. Soil type also plays a role, with many Melbourne gardens featuring clay-rich soils.

Key Considerations When Choosing a Lawn

Before selecting a grass type, consider the following factors:

- **Sunlight Exposure:** How much direct sunlight does your lawn area receive daily? Some grasses thrive in full sun, while others are more tolerant of shade.
- **Foot Traffic:** Will your lawn be a high-traffic area for children, pets, or entertaining? Some grasses are more durable and recover better from wear and tear.
- **Maintenance Level:** How much time and effort are you willing to dedicate to mowing, watering, fertilizing, and weeding? Different grasses have varying maintenance requirements.
- **Water Availability:** Consider local water restrictions and your ability to irrigate. Drought-tolerant varieties are increasingly popular in Melbourne.
- **Aesthetics:** What look and feel do you desire for your lawn? Grasses vary in colour, leaf texture, and growth habit.

Popular Lawn Varieties for Melbourne Gardens

Here are some common and suitable lawn varieties for Melbourne, along with their characteristics:

1. Warm-Season Grasses

These grasses thrive in warmer temperatures and are generally more drought-tolerant. They may go dormant and lose some colour in winter but recover in spring.

Grass Type	Sunlight Needs	Drought Tolerance	Foot Traffic Tolerance	Maintenance Level	Notes
Buffalo Grass	Full sun to partial shade 3-4 hrs	High	High	Moderate	Soft underfoot, good weed suppression, good drought tolerance.
Kikuyu Grass	Full sun 6+ hrs	Very High	Very High	High	Fast-growing, hardy, excellent for high traffic, can be invasive.
Couch Grass	Full sun 5-6 hrs	Very High	High	Moderate to High	Fine leaf, good for sports, requires good drainage, can be invasive.
Zoysia Grass	Full sun to partial shade 4+ hrs	Very High	Moderate	Low to Moderate	Very drought tolerant, slow-growing, low mowing, can be more expensive.

Buffalo Grass



Appearance: Soft, broad-leafed, dense deep green turf.

Key Traits:

- **Excellent Shade Tolerance:** The best performer for gardens with partial to full shade.
- **Drought & Heat Tolerant:** Has excellent recovery abilities once established.
- **Hard-Wearing:** Recovers well from high foot traffic, making it ideal for families with children and pets.
- **Low Allergy:** Considered a low-pollen grass, better for hay fever sufferers.
- **Winter Colour:** Good (dormant in frost)

Best For: The typical Australian family backyard with a mix of sun and shade. The top choice for a durable, all-purpose lawn.

Maintenance: Moderate. Requires regular mowing in the growing season. Avoid cutting too short.

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Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	30 - 50 mm	Begin with a higher cut and gradually lower it towards the ideal 30–50mm range as the weather warms and growth increases. Mowing frequency should be 7 days to manage the vigorous new growth. This is also the best time for light dethatching. No scalping on buffalo grass. Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Summer	30 - 50 mm	Mow every 7-14 days . For shaded areas, keep the cut on the higher side to allow the plant to absorb more sunlight.
Autumn	50 - 40 mm	Gradually increase your

mowing height in late autumn to 50–70mm to prepare for the cooler months. Mow every **14-28 days** as growth slows.

Winter

50 mm

Mow every **21-42 days** as needed. Keep the grass taller, at 50–70mm, to protect it from frost and to maximise the limited sunlight available for photosynthesis.

Kikuyu Grass



Appearance: Light green, coarse-textured, and very vigorous.

Key Traits:

- **Extremely Hard-Wearing:** The most durable grass for very high foot traffic. Can withstand kids and pets playing all day.
- **Rapid Growth & Recovery:** Grows quickly and spreads by runners, repairing damaged areas fast.
- **Drought Tolerant:** Very deep root system helps it survive dry periods.
- **Winter Colour:** Poor (brown)

Best For: Active families with a full-sun lawn that gets a lot of use. Play areas and sports fields.

Maintenance: High. Its aggressive growth requires frequent mowing in summer. It can be invasive and will invade garden beds if not contained with physical edges.

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Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	25 - 40 mm	Mow 7-10 days . Soil reaches 16C and above, best time to scalp/dethatch and fertilise . Safe to scarify . Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.

Summer	25 - 40 mm	Mow 7-10 days . Maintain a slightly higher cut (up to 50–70mm) for any shaded areas of your lawn to help the grass maximize light exposure.
Autumn	40 - 45 mm	As growth slows, reduce mowing frequency to every 14–28 days . You can also gradually raise the cutting height to 40–45mm in preparation for winter.
Winter	40 - 45 mm	Kikuyu becomes semi-dormant, so mow about once every 21-42 days .

Couch Grass



Appearance: Fine to medium leaf with a dense, mat-like growth. Can be a very neat, formal lawn.

Key Traits:

- **Very Dense Growth:** Creates a tight, even surface that feels great underfoot.
- **High Wear Tolerance:** Handles traffic well, though slightly less aggressive than Kikuyu.
- **Spreads Rapidly:** Repairs itself quickly through above-ground runners (stolons).
- **Winter Colour:** Poor (brown)

Best For: Sunny, high-traffic lawns where a neater appearance than Kikuyu is desired. Often used for bowling greens and golf courses.

Maintenance: High. Requires frequent mowing (cylinder mower is ideal), regular feeding, and can form a thick thatch layer that needs dethatching. Will turn brown and go dormant in winter.

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Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	5 - 25 mm	Mow 7-14 days . Start spring with a lower cut to remove dead, brown leaf material that accumulated over winter. Benefits from scalping/dethatching once a year in spring to remove built-up thatch once soil temperatures have risen to 16°C. Safe to scarify . Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Summer	5 - 25 mm	Mow 7-14 days . Depending on your preferred finish, regular, low mowing encourages the dense, lateral growth that couch is known for.
Autumn	30 - 50 mm	Mow 14-21 days . Gradually raise your mower height to 30-50mm to prepare the grass for winter. A longer blade helps the plant maximise limited sunlight.
Winter	30- 50 mm	Keep the grass on the higher side of its recommended range, between 30-50mm. This protects it from frost and cold stress during its dormant period. Mow about once every 21-42 days .

Zoysia Grass



Appearance: A fine-to-medium leafed grass that forms a very dense, weed-resistant turf.

Key Traits:

- **Slow Growth:** Its biggest advantage – requires far less mowing than Kikuyu or Couch.
- **Drought Tolerant:** Becomes very water-efficient once established.
- **Hard-Wearing:** Handles moderate foot traffic well and recovers slowly from damage.
- **Tolerates Light Shade:** More shade tolerant than Couch.
- **Winter Colour:** Poor (brown)

Best For: Homeowners who want a tough, attractive lawn with less mowing work. Excellent for modern, low-maintenance landscapes.

Maintenance: Low Mowing, Moderate Other. Slow to establish and can be prone to thatch. Turns a straw-brown colour in winter (dormant).

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Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	15 - 40 mm	Mow 7-21 days . Start with a lower cut at the beginning of spring to remove dead winter foliage. Benefits from a yearly "scalping/dethatching," a very low cut to remove thatch. *Removing clippings after mowing helps prevent thatch buildup, which is particularly important for Zoysia. Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.

Summer	15 - 40 mm	Mow 7-21 days . The less fertiliser you use, the less often you will need to mow. Keep shaded areas on the higher side of this range (up to 40mm) to help the grass maximise light absorption. <i>*Refer to spring.</i>
Autumn	35 - 45 mm	Mow 21-28 days . Gradually increase the mowing height to 35-45mm as the growth slows down. A longer leaf blade prepares the lawn for winter. <i>*Refer to spring.</i>
Winter	30- 50 mm	Maintaining a taller height protects the grass during its dormant period. Mow about once every 21-42 days . <i>*Refer to spring.</i>

2. Cool-Season Grasses

These grasses prefer cooler temperatures and typically maintain their colour better during winter. They often require more water during hot summers.

Grass Type	Sunlight Needs	Drought Tolerance	Foot Traffic Tolerance	Maintenance Level	Notes
Ryegrass (Perennial)	Full sun to partial shade 4+ hours	Low to Moderate	Moderate	Moderate to High	Fine texture, good winter colour, often used for overseeding warm-season lawns.
Fescue (Tall/Fine)	Full sun to partial shade/shade 3+/2-4 hrs	Moderate to High/Moderate	Moderate/Low	Moderate/Low	Good shade tolerance (fine fescue), deeper roots, good drought tolerance for a cool-season grass.

Ryegrass (Perennial)



Appearance: Fine to medium width, with a soft texture.

Key Traits:

- **Growth Habit:** Grows in clumps and does not spread with runners. This means bare patches will **NOT** fill in on their own and must be **re-seeded**.
- **Wear & Tear:** One of the most hard-wearing grasses available. Ideal for high-traffic areas with kids and pets. Recovers well from damage.
- **Heat Tolerance:** Struggles in prolonged periods of intense heat. Will brown off and go semi-dormant during hot, dry Melbourne summers without ample water.
- **Cold Tolerance:** Thrives in cool weather. The best grass for remaining lush, green, and actively growing throughout Melbourne's winter.
- **Drought Tolerance:** Has a relatively shallow root system. Requires significant and consistent watering to survive a typical Melbourne summer without turning brown.

Best For: Your top priority is having a green lawn all year round, have an active family and need a hard-wearing turf.

Maintenance: Moderate to High. Requires regular mowing in spring/autumn and consistent watering in summer. It is not a low-maintenance option.

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Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	20 - 50 mm	Mow 7 days . Gradually decrease the mowing height as the weather warms and the grass enters its peak growing season. This is the time it's most vigorous and can tolerate a lower cut. No Scalping . Fertilise regularly . Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Summer	50 - 55 mm	Mow 7-14 days . Maintain a taller height during the warmer months. The longer blades provide more shade to the soil and roots, helping to reduce moisture loss and stress from the heat. Requires consistent watering to stay healthy.
Autumn	40 - 55 mm	Mow 7-14 days . As temperatures cool and rainfall increases, the grass will enter a new growth phase. Begin by gradually lowering the cutting height toward the middle of its optimal range. Fertilise regularly . Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Winter	30- 50 mm	Continues to grow during the winter. A shorter cut during this time helps prevent winter diseases by improving air circulation. Mow 14-28 days .

Fescue (Tall and Fine)

➤ Tall Fescue



Appearance: Coarse texture with wide, dark green blades. Forms a dense, bunch-type turf. Does not spread.

Key Traits:

- **Drought Tolerance:** Excellent (Very deep roots)
- **Wear Tolerance:** Good (Handles moderate traffic)
- **Shade Tolerance:** Good (Better than Ryegrass, less than Fine Fescue)
- **Heat Tolerance:** Good (Best of the cool-season grasses for Melbourne summer)

Best For: Homeowners wanting a low-water, cool-season lawn. Lawns with a mix of sun and shade.

Maintenance: Moderate to High. Requires regular mowing in spring/autumn and consistent watering in summer. It is not a low-maintenance option.

➔ Mowing Guide

Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	30 - 60 mm	Mow 14-21 days . The shorter leaf blades will help improve air circulation. No scalping . Vary mowing patterns. *Mowing in different directions each time helps prevent ruts and promotes more upright and even growth. Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Summer	50 - 80 mm	Mow 14-21 days . A higher cut during summer is crucial for tall fescue, as the taller blades shade the soil, keeping it cooler and helping the grass survive the intense

heat. Mowing too short can cause it to dry out and thin.
**Refer to Spring.*

Autumn

60 - 80 mm

Mow **21-28 days**. The grass will thrive in the cooler, moister conditions. Maintain a **higher cut to protect the roots** and store energy before winter. **Core aeration** depending on thatch and compaction.
**Refer to Spring.*

Winter

50- 70 mm

While tall fescue continues to grow in winter, a slightly higher cut will help protect it from frost and cold stress. Mow about once every **21-42 days**.
**Refer to Spring.*

➤ Fine Fescue



Appearance: Very fine, needle-like blades. Forms a soft, carpet-like turf. Some varieties spread weakly.

Key Traits:

- **Drought Tolerance:** Good (In shade)
- **Wear Tolerance:** Poor (For ornamental use only)
- **Shade Tolerance:** Excellent (The best choice for deep shade)
- **Heat Tolerance:** Poor (Struggles in full sun and heat)

Best For: Ornamental lawns in deep shade and low-traffic areas where aesthetics are key.

Maintenance: Low. Watering: Low (Especially in shade).

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Season	Recommended Height	Notes
Spring	35 - 70 mm	Mow 7 days . Gradually decrease the height from the winter cut as the grass becomes more vigorous. A light dethatch can be done. Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Summer	70 - 100 mm	Mow 14-21 days . Keeping the blades longer helps the grass's root system stay cool and conserves moisture during the hot Melbourne summer.
Autumn	35 - 70 mm	Mow 7-14 days . This is a period of strong growth for cool-season grasses. You can lower the height in preparation for winter, which will also help improve air circulation. Core aeration depending on thatch and compaction.
Winter	35 - 50 mm	Continues to grow in winter and can tolerate a shorter cut during this time. Mow about once every 14-28 days .

Installation Methods

There are several ways to establish your new lawn:

- **Turf (Rolls/Slabs):** Provides an instant lawn, ideal for immediate results. Requires careful preparation and immediate watering.
- **Seed:** More cost-effective, but takes longer to establish and requires consistent care during germination. Buffalo grass cannot be seeded.
- **Sprigs/Plugs:** Small pieces of grass planted individually, suitable for some varieties like Zoysia.

Ongoing Lawn Care

Regardless of your choice, proper care is essential for a healthy lawn:

- **Watering:** Water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep root growth. Adjust based on rainfall and temperature.
- **Mowing:** Mow at the recommended height for your grass type. Taller grass can help shade roots and suppress weeds.
- **Fertilizing:** Apply a suitable fertilizer according to product instructions and your lawn's needs.
- **Weed Control:** Address weeds promptly through manual removal or appropriate herbicides.
- **Aeration:** Periodically aerate your lawn to improve air, water, and nutrient penetration, especially in compacted soils.

Conclusion

By carefully considering your garden's specific conditions and your lifestyle, you can select a lawn that not only looks great but also thrives in the Melbourne environment. A well-chosen and cared-for lawn will be a source of enjoyment for years to come.