

Dear Monarch,

The grass in our neighborhood turns brown and looks dead every winter. What is the landscape contractor doing about it? What can I do for my own lawn?

WINTER TURF

Dear Concerned Resident,

Winter is the best time to assess the landscape and plan for the season ahead and this includes your turf. While we may pause mowing, reduce irrigation, and have fewer weeds to battle, there are still considerations to be made for your dormant grass. To help warm season turfgrasses – these include Bermuda (common and hybrid), Paspalum, St. Augustine, and Kikuyu – enjoy their winter break, plan ahead and provide the turf with the necessities for success. When the warm season returns, your grass is primed and ready to grow for the warm season.

- **Brown turf** is healthy turf (when dormant). Dormant turf is not dead! Gradually changing color as the weather turns cooler is a perfectly natural feature of many plants. Embrace the seasonal change and loss of chlorophyll. By allowing the turf to rest, you are making time for other maintenance tasks in the landscape.
- **Foot traffic.** Prevent wear patterns and the resultant compaction. Pay attention to areas with constant mechanical damage. Usually this results in places like next to the curb where you may step in and out of your car daily. Use ropes and stakes, signs, and physical barriers to keep foot and equipment traffic from concentrating if necessary while the grass recovers.
- **Stay hydrated.** One of the benefits of dormant turf is the reduced need for our most precious resource – water! This does not mean that soil should be allowed to dry up completely. Monitor and maintain adequate soil moisture to prevent desiccation and protect the health of your soil microbiome.
- **Shady business.** Pay attention to sun angles throughout the year and how it affects your turf. Prune trees as needed to allow for light (always following ISA guidelines) but consider removing turf that is consistently shaded.

MONARCH TIP

Dead or dormant? A population of grass (for example, your lawn) will enter dormancy gradually and mostly uniformly. Isolated spots of discoloration may indicate pest or disease and not dormancy.