

## Seedheads make for tough mowing

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Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, and perennial ryegrass are either producing or soon will be producing seedheads (Figs. 1 and 2) across the upper Midwest. This natural phenomenon is induced by daylength last fall and winter, but seedhead production is induced by longer days and warming spring temperatures. This is true in most grasses, but amount and timing of seedhead production varies among species and cultivars as well as with weather. Seedheads detract from the appearance of a turf because they grow quickly and unevenly and the tough seed stalks (Fig. 3) do not cut cleanly except with the sharpest of mower blades. After mowing, the grass may appear a lighter green to even white because of the exposed seed stalks. Turfgrass plants expend a lot of energy producing seedheads and thus turf density usually decreases during this time as energy is directed to the seed stalk and away from the leaves. Some cultivars may produce more seedheads than others, so some lawns or patches of a single lawn may have more seedheads than other areas. These seedheads need to mature on the stem for about four months before viable, so the seedheads produced now will not germinate when they are mowed or if they are moved as mulch to a garden (the exception to this is annual bluegrass [Fig. 4] but that's a whole different discussion). The most effective way to control seedheads is through mowing frequently with a sharp mower blade. Do not set the mower lower during seedhead production as some recommend. Professional turf managers may use growth regulators to manage seedheads of annual bluegrass, but timing and rate of application must be extremely accurate and it's too late to apply once the seedheads are visible. We expect the seedhead production to last only about a month, so the problem should subside soon.



**Figure 1.** Kentucky bluegrass that is a heavy seed producer (2009 photo)



**Figure 2.** Kentucky bluegrass just starting to form a seedhead.



**Figure 3.** Seed stalk of Kentucky bluegrass requires significant resources from other parts of the plant to form and very difficult to mow.



**Figure 4.** Seedhead production in annual bluegrass. Much lighter green than Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue, can form seedheads almost throughout the year, and seeds are almost immediately viable once formed.