

Seven Steps to a Perfect New Lawn

Extracted from The Lawn Institute Special Topic Sheets

Successful lawn construction means doing the right thing at the right time. Your finished turf will reflect the degree of care and planting you use. The results will depend on how well you modify the soil to make it more favorable and on the care with which you choose the cultivars planted. It will depend also on how well and how carefully you carry out each of the following seven steps:

- Step 1. Plan
- Step 2. Measure
- Step 3. Fertilize, Feed & Fill
- Step 4. Sow the Seed
- Step 5. Rake & Roll
- Step 6. Water
- Step 7. Mow

Plan Lawn Construction

Late summer and early fall plantings produce the best results. Early spring is the second best time to seed a new lawn, but don't work the soil when it's sticky or wet.

Sometimes a new lawn must be started in late spring or early summer. At this time of year, you must keep the topsoil moist by frequent sprinkling. Adding extra organic matter to the soil before seeding, covering the seed with a little extra topsoil and protecting the seeding with a covering of 1/16-1/8" inch of clean straw will serve to conserve moisture and encourage the seeding turf. If water is limited, don't seed a lawn in late spring or early summer.

Measure Lawn Area

Additions of organic matter, sand, lime, fertilizers, and seed are all made at rates on the basis of 1000 sq ft. You won't be able to carry out most of the following steps unless you know the size of your lawn.

Fertilize, Feed & Fill

For most soils, standard recommendations for organic matter, lime and fertilizer should result in an attractive lawn. Where there's doubt about the suitability of your soil for lawn use, a soil test will aid in judging its texture, acidity, and plant food requirements. Recommendations based on soil tests are available from county extension offices, commercial concerns, landscape contractors and nurserymen. To get a soil sample, take several specimens, each from a depth of 3 inches, from scattered parts of the proposed lawn area. Take the samples before you make any treatments, combine them, mix well and save 1 cup full of the mixture for the soil test.

Keep topsoil in a pile if building a new home. Spread it evenly over the lawn area after a stable, well-drained subsoil has been established. The final grade or slope of the lawn should be such that good surface drainage is evident. Normally, a fall of 1 foot in each 50 feet will keep excess water moving through the surface of the lawn turf. Too steep a slope may lead to erosion, difficulties in mowing, and possible "scalping" at the top or crown. Not more than a 1 foot drop in 3 is recommended. Spreading topsoil and final grading may be started at any time the soil is dry enough to be worked without sticking to implements or becoming compacted. Remove stones, roots and other material from the topsoil in this operation. The thickness of the topsoil should be uniform on slopes and in level areas alike.

Organic matter and other soil additives can usually be mixed with the topsoil using a small rotary garden tractor. Hand mixing is slow, hard work and seldom results in a uniform mixture. Even distribution of these mater-

ials in the top 4-6 inches of soil is most important.

Ground limestone, complete fertilizer and additional superphosphate may all be spread on the soil at the same time. Mix them into the soil without delay. Rake these into the top 4 inches of soil as the final grade and planting bed are prepared. After raking, roll soil with a heavy roller, 200-300 lbs, to define humps and hollows. Rake the surface lightly to even off these irregularities and to prepare a loose planting bed of 1/4-1/2 inch of soil.

Sow the Seed

Use either a mechanical spreader or scatter the seed by hand. Either will be most uniform when the air is calm. Best results are obtained by dividing the seed bed into several equal parts and setting apart a portion of the seed for each area. Seed half the seed for each area in one direction and the other half a at right angles to the first.

Rake and Roll

Rake in the seed lightly. Be careful that the teeth just touch the soil surface. Too much pressure will cover the seeds too deeply or move some of them and leave bare spots in the new lawn. Cover the seed until about 10% is still visible. Roll the area with a light roller (50-75 lbs) to firm the soil.

Water Frequently

Frequent light watering promotes seed germination and rapid establishment of the lawn. Don't allow the seed bed to dry or become soaked. For light sprinkling, hand watering usually gives better regulation than a sprinkler. As grass begins to grow, decrease the frequency, but increase the amount of water each time. Normally a 2-month-old turf may be watered the same as an established lawn.

Mow the New Lawn

Mow as soon as the cutting height reaches 1 1/2-2 inches. Keep your mower sharp or young plants will be injured. Until the new turf has filled in, mowing should be the only traffic on the turf. The fertilizer on a spring-planted lawn should last until fall. Re-fertilize at that time. Re-fertilize fall lawns in spring.