



Rockin E Gardening Handouts

Tips and Suggestions for 'Year-Round' Gardening

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Planting A Lawn From Seed

To start new lawns, many people wonder which is better, laying sod or planting seed. Sodding is more expensive than seed, but it offers an instant carpet of grass that can be used within weeks. It can be installed in difficult places, such as areas that are steep or heavily trafficked. Sod can be laid almost any time during the growing season.

While laying sod is fast, and produces high-quality new lawns, seeding lawns is less expensive and offers a wider choice of grass varieties. Seeding is the most economical way to start a lawn, and seeding produces as good, if not better, results in the long run. Over-seeding an existing lawn can provide a quick and easy way to thicken and rejuvenate older, established grassy areas.



The best time to plant a new lawn by seed is late-August to mid-October. Fewer weeds germinate at this time, and moderating temperatures encourage grass root growth. Just make sure there is still ample time for the grass to become established before winter. In nature, grass seed ripens and falls to the ground in late-summer and germinates as the nights get cooler in the fall, and while the soil is still warm.

Late-April through May is the next best choice for planting seed. However, there is increased competition with weeds and the need for more consistent watering.

Grass can actually be seeded anytime during the summer, but it requires more careful monitoring of the watering schedule during the hot weather, especially if wind is an issue.



What You Need:

- * High Quality Grass Seed.
- * Starter Fertilizer.
- * Soil Conditioners to mix into the soil.
- * Topdressing Mulch.
- * Fertilizer and Seed Spreader.
- * Peatmoss Spreader.
- * Tiller (Rototiller).
- * Roller or 'Soil Drag'.
- * Landscape Rake.



How should I prepare the soil?

Keep in mind that you will be expecting the grass to grow in the same soil for many years to come, so now is your only chance to make the soil the best possible.



How much work the soil will require depends on its current condition. If you have a good, rich soil with lots of organic matter, simply loosen the top two or three inches, even out the grade, rake to smooth the surface, and remove clods and rocks.

If your soil is hard, either with a lot of sand or with heavy clay, you may need to add more top soil, compost,

manure, or Utelite to improve the soil.

Spread a layer, several inches thick, on top of the existing soil. Till the soil amendments into the top six inches of the existing, native soil. You do not want to have a layer of good soil on top of the native soil, or the roots will not penetrate as deeply into the soil as they should. The roots will just stay in the top layer of good soil.

Steps to Plant Grass from Seed

Step 1. Remove the old lawn and/or weeds, if any exist. One way to accomplish this is just by digging them out with a shovel (make sure you get all the roots). Another method is to apply an herbicide, then use a sod-cutter to remove the roots and all.



Step 2. Break up the compacted soil with a tiller. It is very important that all debris is removed. Do not bury lumber, tree stumps, or other woody material. Buried rotting wood can cause mushrooms in the lawn, or a condition known as fairy ring.



Step 3. Spread a starter fertilizer, such as 16-16-8 Multi-purpose fertilizer, over the soil. This type of fertilizer is high in phosphorus; the middle number in the NPK sequence on a fertilizer bag.

Step 4. Spread as much soil conditioner, compost, or manure as practical (or that you can afford), over the soil. If your soil has a high pH, apply sulfur or gypsum to help lower the pH. If your soil contains a lot of clay, or is extremely hard, add Utelite soil conditioner to help loosen the soil.

How Much Soil Conditioner?

The addition of two-to-three cubic yards of compost per 1,000 square feet will help increase the water holding ability of a sandy soil, and it will also help to loosen up a heavy clay soil. A cubic yard of Utelite Soil Conditioner will cover approximately 300 square feet if it is applied



one inch thick. You may need to use more or less of these soil conditioners, depending on the type of soil you have in your yard. **Remember: now is the only time you can improve the soil condition in your lawn area!**

Step 5. Again using the tiller, till the starter fertilizer and the mulch into the soil as deeply, and as thoroughly as possible. I know this seems like a lot of work, but good soil preparation is the most important step in seeding lawns successfully. The more uniform the soil texture is, the more uniformly your grass will grow.

Step 6. Rake the soil to begin to level it out. Remove any rocks and debris that you find. To avoid problems with excess water-runoff, make sure that any site grading you do allows the water to flow away from your house.



Step 7. Compact the soil as needed, to help prevent uneven settling. Several methods can help the soil settle. One way is to build a 'Soil Drag' using 4 - 8' long 2"x4" boards. Pull the drag over the area in several different directions to help level and settle the soil. A second way to settle the soil is to use a water roller, (which can be rented) to roll back and forth over the area. Fill the roller's drum with water to make it as heavy as you need it. You will also use the roller to do some finish work, after you plant your seed.



Step 8. Use a landscape rake (30" to 42" wide) to make your final leveling and smoothing more effective. Landscape rakes are very important to prevent uneven 'bumps' in your lawn. Landscape rakes can be rented, so you do not have to buy one.



Step 9. Spread your seed evenly. Following the recommended seeding rate, spread 1/3 of the seed over the entire lawn area. Then repeat 2 more times, each time using 1/3 of the seed. Each time you distribute seed, apply it in a different direction, to encourage even seed dispersal.



How much seed do I need?

One of the causes for the failure of seed to grow well, is not using the correct amount of grass seed. When too little seed is used, the grass is not very thick. It takes a longer time for the grass to fill the area and to become strong rooted. When too much seed is placed in a small area, the competition for space is intense. Several naturally occurring seedling diseases can kill new plants. If the seed is growing too close together, these seedling diseases can kill a newly seeded area literally 'overnight'.

There are different recommendations for each variety of seed, so check the label for the recommended amount to use when seeding a lawn.

Seed Facts: A pound of Kentucky Bluegrass seed has over a million seeds. Perennial ryegrass has 270,000 seeds per pound. Dwarf Tall Fescue has 210,000 seeds per pound. Red Fescue has 400,000 seeds per pound. A pound of grass seed covers a fairly large area - pretty thoroughly.

Step 10. Rake the seed lightly, with a leaf rake, to cover the seed with a thin layer of soil.

Step 11. Optional- If you raked the seed with a leaf rake, (step 10) you do not need to complete this step - (step 11). Use the roller again. Make sure to empty the water from the drum, because you want it lighter this time. Roll the lawn surface to press the seed into the soil.



Step 12. Apply a very fine layer of mulch, such as **Peatmoss** or **Black Forest Compost** to help maintain a consistent moisture level for the next 3 to 4 weeks. You can rent a Peatmoss Spreading Roller to help make applying this mulch much, much easier.

Step 13. You're done seeding the lawn, but you're not done working! The seeds must be watered properly, in order for them to germinate. Water with just a fine spray - you don't want to create a flood! The soil should be kept evenly moist, which may mean several waterings per day (depending on the weather). The hotter and windier the weather, the more frequent the watering needs to occur.



How often do I water?

Keep the seeded areas uniformly moist for 14 to 21 days to ensure good germination. It is best to water the areas every few hours; you may need to water 3-4-5 times each day. Light, frequent watering is better than infrequent, heavy watering.

Once the seed starts to emerge, continue watering a little less frequently until the area has been mowed two or three times. Increase the length of time you water, and decrease the number of times you apply water each day. Start using normal watering practices after you have mowed the lawn two or three times.

When can I mow the areas?

Don't mow until the grass is at least 3" to 4" tall. It needs to be allowed time to set deep roots without having to repair the top damage caused by mowing. When you do start mowing your new lawn, start very high, reduce the height by half an inch with each subsequent mowing, until you are able to mow it at your desired height. You can mow the lawn as often as you normally do. It will not hurt the new plants and it may help to keep weeds under control. Keep foot traffic to a minimum, but an occasional step or two on the new grass will not hurt it.



Step 14. Expect weeds, and resist the urge to control them chemically. New soil always comes with a large quantity of weed seeds, and more will blow in as your lawn grows. A newly sprouting lawn will be quite ineffective at inhibiting the germination of these weeds, and as a result there will be all kinds of weeds happily growing along with your new grass.

You must resist the urge to treat any of these



weeds with chemicals - it is critical that the grass be allowed to grow with no chemical interference at all. Don't worry; the majority of these weeds are annuals. They will die during the winter and not be back the following year, while your new grass will continue to grow and crowd out new weed seeds. Most of the perennial weeds will be eliminated with regular mowing, which they cannot tolerate. The truly persistent weeds can ultimately be controlled with chemicals, or by other organic means, a year down the road.

Step 15. Treat the lawn with TLC for its entire first growing season. Your new lawn won't be very tough or durable for at least 2 years. Until that time, pamper it. It won't be ready for football or wedding receptions for some time yet, so stay off it as much as possible. Pay close attention to watering and fertilizing. Don't apply any herbicides at all during its first full growing year; these will stunt the grass and actually favor the weeds! Remember, your best protection against weeds is a thick and well-established lawn.



Step 16. Reseed any thin patches when you first see them. Thin patches may appear throughout your lawn, despite your best efforts, so expect them and deal with them promptly. The bare spots will allow weeds to germinate unchallenged. Make sure you use the same grass seed, tamp the seed down firmly, and water lightly. The seed may germinate unevenly, from the rest of the lawn, and the spots will stand out, but this is only temporary.

What type of grass is best?

Many lawns are starting to be heavily infested with billbugs, or have an incurable lawn disease. At a recent turf field day held at USU, an entomologist discussed how a normal infestation is about 1 billbug per square foot. That number has risen now to approximately 6 billbugs per square foot. The lawn could handle the 1, but not the 6, so the lawn struggles.

Also, Necrotic ringspot disease is widespread throughout this area, and is becoming a major lawn problem.

What is the solution to these problems? How about spraying more pesticides? **WRONG ANSWER!**

For bill bugs, and some other lawn insects, the right answer may be to over-seed with either tall fescue or with perennial ryegrass. Why those two grasses? Because, they contain a fungus called endophyte. When a chewing or sucking insect comes along and tries to eat the leaf blade of these grasses, the endophyte is ingested by the insect and the endophyte kills the insect. With the use of endophyte enhanced turf, your lawn may be more healthy without the use of as many pesticides..

As bugs come out of hibernation, instead of reaching for the insecticide, try over-seeding the lawn with an 'insect resistant' type of grass. Nature has the answer for turf competing against bugs. It is found in endophytes. Unfortunately, not all lawn insects are affected by endophytes, and some insects may still need timely applications of insecticides.

The same is true with many lawn diseases. Sometimes the best, and only cure, is to plant a variety of grass that is '**Disease Resistant**', not just try to control it with fungicides.

What type of grass should I plant?

That is a hard question to answer. There are many types to choose from. Sometimes the best answer is to plant a mixture of several types.



Many times, homeowners will just buy an inexpensive seed they find at a lawn and garden center, or at a discount store. However, it is a good idea to invest in good quality seed. Over the long run, the newer, more expensive varieties of grass will actually save you money. You may need less fertilizer, less water, less insecticides, or less fungicides.

Choose a mixture with more than one variety in the blend. The reason is that if one type of grass becomes susceptible to a lawn disease, the others may not; the resistant variety will be able to continue to provide a nice, healthy lawn.

Kentucky Bluegrass is the most common grass in this area. It is used in lawns, athletic fields, golf courses and parks. It is a cool season grass, which means it grows best in the spring and fall. Kentucky bluegrass suffers during the heat of summer, but it is very resilient. It may go dormant when water is scarce, and it will usually recover once the temperatures drop and consistent water becomes available.



With proper management, Kentucky bluegrass forms a fine-textured, high-quality, long-lasting turf. It produces rhizomes (underground stems) that give rise to new bluegrass plants. This ability enables bluegrass to rapidly recuperate from injury and to fill in thin areas of the lawn. Kentucky bluegrass is winter-hardy and capable of withstanding temperature and moisture extremes. If high quality grass is required during the summer period, consistent lawn irrigation is necessary because Kentucky bluegrass requires moist, well-drained soil.

Bluegrass can be allowed to go dormant during drought periods; as little as 1/2 inch of water every 1 to 2 weeks will keep the crowns of the grass alive, but the blades will turn brown. Then, in the fall, when the temperature starts to drop, and irrigation is resumed, the grass will recover. The drought resistance of Kentucky bluegrass is generally underestimated. Bluegrass can survive several months without significant irrigation as long as you can tolerate its appearance.

Major diseases of Kentucky bluegrass turf include Fusarium, Helminthosporium leaf spot, Necrotic Ring Spot, Take-All Patch, Rust, and Powdery Mildew. Always plant a mixture of several varieties of Kentucky bluegrass to help avoid these diseases. Mixing Kentucky bluegrass with perennial ryegrass also provides a good suppression of many turf diseases; including Necrotic Ringspot. Sometimes the best prevention, and the only cure for Kentucky bluegrass diseases, is to add Perennial Ryegrass.

Perennial Ryegrass lawns are one of the best '*lower maintenance lawns*'. This is one of the toughest and most wearable turf grasses that can be grown. Perennial ryegrass uses up to 25% less water than bluegrass. Ryegrass is noted for quick germination, a shiny green color, medium-fine texture and dense forming sod. High disease and insect resistance also helps to make perennial ryegrass one of the leading choices for home lawns, parks and athletic fields.



Ryegrass is often chosen because it produces a dark green turf which develops a strong root system; it responds rapidly to

fertilization, it never needs pampering, and it is not subject to the disease problems which plague some Kentucky bluegrasses. Ryegrass performs well in a wide variety of soil types and will grow well in clay or compacted areas when aerated regularly.

Perennial ryegrass can also be mixed with other grasses. Perennial ryegrass is often added to Kentucky bluegrass to help improve strength, and to give bluegrass time to repair itself while the perennial ryegrass is still in full growth. These two grass species can be mowed at the same height and retain a sod density for which both are well known. Although bluegrass needs more fertilizer and water, perennial ryegrass will respond to additional amounts without any problems.

Dwarf Tall fescue are grasses that can endure heavy traffic and have been developed for high disease resistance, insect resistance, better blade structure, less mowing, and better color.

Tall fescue has been traditionally used as a low-maintenance grass, in areas where a coarser texture is not objectionable. Tall fescue tolerates soils with low fertility, persists well under low maintenance, and possesses good tolerance to insects and diseases. When mature, tall fescue has excellent wear tolerance, and due to its deep-rooted nature, tolerates drought conditions well, and will remain green throughout most summers.

Recently, a number of improved dwarf 'turf-type' tall fescue cultivars have become available. These improved cultivars are less coarse, grow more upright, and exhibit a darker green color. All tall fescues grow rapidly in the spring, and require more frequent mowing than Kentucky bluegrass to look groomed. The popularity of these improved dwarf, turf-type tall fescues is increasing. They are now being used on many lawn sites; playgrounds, parks and low-maintenance athletic fields where the use of coarser textured grasses is not objectionable.

Dwarf, tall fescue lawns can easily be over seeded when the lawn is thin and starting to get a bunching, clumping, uneven appearance. Dwarf tall fescue can be over seeded in the fall to get the lawn into shape before the next hot summer weather sets in. Dwarf types of tall fescue mixed with either Kentucky Bluegrass, or with Perennial Ryegrass, is highly recommended.

Red fescue is also called Creeping red fescue and is a cool season grass used in the northern and temperate areas. Red fescue is in the fine fescues category and has narrow deep green blades. This fescue can be grown in single stands and prefers shadier and cooler areas than most other cool season grasses. Red fescue is often added to Bluegrass and Perennial Ryegrass mixtures and improves these mixtures by increasing shade tolerance. It also has fairly drought resistant qualities.

Red fescue can establish in the lawn quickly, while the slower growing bluegrass is forming. This fescue variety is a non aggressive easily maintained grass and over-seeds quite well in the areas of adaptation. Besides being a lawn cover it is quite beautiful when left un-mown in a meadow or for roadside growth and erosion sites on slopes or hill sides. Red fescues are one of the most widely used grasses in mixtures to overseed cool grass lawns. Do not plant red fescue by itself, it is a tender grass in the heat and will not tolerate heavy traffic by itself. Always buy it in a mixture that contains bluegrass and/or ryegrass.



Chewings fescue resembles Tall fescues in growth being more upright than creeping, yet still retaining the fine texture of the fine fescue group. The predominant use of chewings fescue is in addition to other grass seed mixtures. One of the most popular is the mixture of perennial rye grass and chewings fescue. The adaptations of chewings improves the predominant grass' ability to better perform.

As all fescues do, chewings grows well in the shade, is drought resistant, non-aggressive and blends well with almost any grass. Chewings is not as wear tolerant as other grasses of the fescues, but can be mown lower and prefers to grow on more sandy soils of low fertility. It over-seeds well into other lawns for better diversity and problem solving.

Hard fescue is indeed one of the "hardest" of the fescues. Shade and drought resistant, and more disease resistant, this fescue grows best in the north and the higher elevations. Hard fescue has beautiful blue-green color, and can grow in some of the most adverse of conditions and in heavily shaded areas. Hard fescue grows in clump formations and may not be mown as low as the other fescues. Hard fescue is one grass that stays green a longer period of time, is slow growing and a low maintenance grass. Varieties of hard fescue are being developed for extended usage and acceptability as lawn grasses. This fescue makes an ideal conservation, erosion control, and reclamation planting in areas not easily maintained and is the only fescue that is salt tolerant. They are great on hillsides, mixed with wildflowers, for an easy maintenance cover planting.



Ryegrass Seeding Rates

- * Sown alone: 4-8 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The heavier the seeding rates, the thicker the turf.
- * Mixed with Kentucky bluegrass or fine fescue: 3-4 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- * Where traffic is very heavy: 6-10 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- * To maintain quality turf: Reseed at a rate of approximately 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet

Bluegrass Seeding Rates

- * Sown alone: 4-8 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The heavier the seeding rates, the thicker the turf.
- * Mixed with ryegrass or fine fescue: 4-8 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- * Where traffic is very heavy: 6-10 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- * To maintain quality turf: Reseed at a rate of approximately 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet

Tall Fescue Seeding Rates

- * Sown alone: 10 pounds per 1,000 square feet. The heavier the seeding rates, the thicker the turf.
- * Mixed with Kentucky bluegrass or fine fescue: 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- * Where traffic is very heavy: 15 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- * To maintain quality turf: Reseed at a rate of approximately 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Remember that good seed usually costs a little more. If your lawn is important to you, a couple of extra dollars spent for good seed will be well worth it in the long run.

