



Rockin E Gardening Handouts

Tips and Suggestions for 'Year-Round' Gardening

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'Over-Seed' or 'Rejuvenate' Your Lawn

"Over-seeding lawns" is just what it sounds like. Namely, you are sowing new seed over existing grass, in order to fill in the bare patches, or to invigorate the existing grass. Healthy, well maintained lawns are attractive landscape additions, while lawns in poor condition are sometimes unsightly. Many homeowners assume, incorrectly, that fertilizer and water is all that is needed to keep a lawn thick, healthy, and free of weeds. Grass gets tired and weak. It needs to be revitalized every five or six years.

Most lawns can be easily improved just by 'over-seeding' once in a while. With a little time and effort, you can change your 'not-so-good-looking' lawn into the 'best-in-the-neighborhood' lawn.



Why should you overseed?

"If I fertilize my lawn properly, why do I need to add new seed, especially if my grass looks pretty good right now?"

Are there bare spots that require attention? Are there areas that are thin and weak due to shady conditions? Is there damage that needs lawn repair from either insect damage or disease activity? Are there areas that are thin due to repeated foot traffic, or from pet activity?



You may need to assess your lawn's needs. New spots, smaller than a salad plate, will generally fill-in by themselves, assuming the lawn receives the recommended amount of fertilizer and care it needs. Older, 'small spots', or new, 'large areas', will need some assistance to fill in. Sod is one viable alternative to consider when faced with repairing damaged areas, but there is a better alternative.

Overseeding is an overlooked activity in home lawn care. Many homeowners assume, incorrectly, that fertilizer and water is all that is needed to keep turf thick and free of weeds. Grass gets tired and weak. It needs to be revitalized every few years. After five or six years, grass plants will slow down their reproduction rates; they produce less seed and fewer rhizomes. Weak, thin grass invites problems.

Overseeding is not difficult and the benefits far outweigh the cost of investing the modest amount of time, and the effort it takes, to make it happen.

Overseeding compensates both for the natural slow down of the turf's natural reproduction, and from the grass not being allowed to grow long enough to produce new seed by itself.

There are two major benefits to overseeding every four to six years. First, you insure your lawn stays thick and dense, or if it has thinned, you will make it thick again. Thick grass has few, if any, weeds if it is mowed 2" to 3" tall.



The second, and probably the most important benefit, is disease resistance. The new varieties of seed you sow will have better disease resistance than those varieties already growing in your lawn.



Your goal should be to have a lawn that is as dense as brand new sod. Go to a new yard with freshly laid sod and try to spread the grass blades to see if you can see any soil. Usually, the grass is so thick you cannot see soil. Now, go and check your own lawn, to see if by spreading the grass blades you can see any soil. It is likely the soil will be readily visible. That means your lawn is thin and needs to be overseeded.

Individual grass plants will often die because of insect damage, disease problems, shade issues, over fertilization, over-or-under watering, misuse of herbicides, improper mowing, or it might just be the end of it's natural life cycle.

How does 'natural' grass combat these issues?

By creating and dropping seed! If native grass is in a stressed situation, it will put all it's remaining energy into seed production. It produces extra seed, it lets the seed mature, drop, and hopefully the new seed can germinate and take it's place. This process is the most important thing to dying grass plants.

So, if seed production is the most important thing for a native grass plant to do, what should we do for our lawn? Second to watering it, we should be reseeding it. When was the last time your lawn was reseeded? When was the last time your grass was 'beheaded' by mowing; the seeds were eliminated before they had a chance to mature, drop and germinate?

When you overseed, try to introduce new varieties of grass that may be more drought tolerant, more heat tolerant, more insect and disease resistant, or that may be more aggressive.



What is overseeding?

Overseeding is the planting of grass seed directly into existing turf, without removing the existing roots or changing the soil. It's an easy way to fill in bare spots, improve the thickness and density of your lawn, establish improved grass varieties and even enhance your lawn's color. Golf courses do it all the time.

If your lawn looks old, or just 'worn out'; if it needs increasing amounts of water and fertilizer to thrive, if it is disease prone or if insects have damaged it, it's the perfect time for 'over-seeding' your lawn.

Benefits of Overseeding

Many older lawns were planted with common turf grasses that are not suited for the needs of today's conditions. They are often more disease and insect prone, and often require more fertilizer and water to maintain their appearance.

Overseeding an older lawn with newer turfgrass varieties can help it better withstand insects, diseases, drought, shady conditions, and even heavy foot traffic. The investment in overseeding pays off by reducing the amount of fertilizer, water and pesticides it requires. Most importantly, a renovated lawn stays greener and looks thicker and healthier. A golf course may spend more money on grass seed than it spends on fertilizer and pesticides.

When to overseed

Late-summer or early-fall is the very best time, of the entire year, to overseed lawns. Soil and temperatures are most favorable for seed germination and growth. With adequate moisture, fertilizer and sunlight, the new seedlings will be well established before the cold winter weather sets in. Also, weed competition is less of a problem at this time of year.

Spring overseeding is the second best time to overseed your lawn. Just be aware of some the risks; the chance of weather-related problems, heavy spring rains, unexpected hot summer temperatures, and from weed competition. Also, spring seeding may interfere with the application of pre-emergent crabgrass or broadleaf weed killers. Concurrent applications of both seed and herbicides is generally not recommended because the herbicides may cause poor seedling growth. It is best to delay any herbicide treatment until at least 4 to 6 weeks after the new grass seed germinates. If you choose to overseed in the spring, be sure to take these factors into consideration.

Mid-summer overseeding is definitely not the best time to overseed. It faces greater challenges of heat, disease problems, drought stress, and weed competition. Proper weed control and adequate irrigation are musts if overseeding is attempted in the summer.

Dormant overseeding involves seeding in late-fall or early-winter, after the soil temperature is cold enough to



prevent seed germination. Success usually requires good snow cover during the winter to prevent wind or water erosion, to prevent the birds from eating the seed, and to ensure germination doesn't begin too early the following spring. This method is sometimes preferred over spring seeding because you don't have to wait for soil or moisture conditions to improve in the spring before overseeding.

How difficult can overseeding a lawn be?

You throw some fertilizer on it, throw some seed on it, water it a little, and instantly, you have a picture perfect lawn. Right? If your goal is to feed the birds, then follow that process. If your goal is to improve the overall appearance of your lawn, then there is still more to consider in terms of overseeding your lawn.

Basic Overseeding Guidelines

Step 1. Mow the lawn short; as short as your lawnmower will allow.

Step 2. Use a lawn thatch rake, or rent a power rake, to loosen the soil and to dethatch the lawn. One or two passes over the entire area should be sufficient.

Remove excess thatch (1/2 inch or more) from the lawn. You should rake the overseeding area thoroughly, leaving just stubble and bare soil, with no debris. The reason for this step is that grass seed will not germinate if it is not in direct contact with the soil. If it is sitting on thatch, grass clippings, or on any other debris, it becomes bird food.

Step 3. In severe cases, aerate thoroughly, using a core-type aerator. They remove plugs of soil when run over the lawn. You may need to go over the area three or four times with the core aerator. When finished, there should be about 20 holes per square foot. Either rake up and remove the plugs, or drag the area with a piece of chain link fence, or other matting, to break up the soil cores.

Step 4. Fertilize with a good grass seed starting fertilizer, such as **Multi purpose 16-16-8 Fertilizer** or **25-5-10 Lawn Food**.

Step 5. Spread the seed, using your preferred grass seed mixture. Cheap grass seed is not the most economical seed to use when you are over-seeding. Always buy good, high quality grass seed.

Step 6. Rake the seed into the soil with a leaf rake.

Step 7. After overseeding, give the area a heavy watering right away, to wash the seed down into soil. Proper watering is very critical to successful germination.

Note: In most cases, you do not need to apply peatmoss or mulch. There is usually plenty of cover from organic material left in the soil, to keep the seedbed moist.

However: If you miss a day or two of watering, once the seed starts to germinate, and the seed dries out, you may lose up to 30 percent germination -- they don't tell you that on the seed box, but it happens.

Step 8. Water the area consistently for the next 4 to



6 weeks. Newly seeded areas will need extra water until the grass can develop a deep root system.



Post Seeding Care

Keep the seeded area moist with frequent, light applications of water. It may be necessary to water two or three times a day for the first week or two. Mow the lawn at a height of 1.5" to 2". Mow the lawn frequently to reduce competition from the established turfgrass.

When the new seedlings reach a height of 1.5" to 2" tall, increase the mowing height over the next several weeks. The ultimate mowing height should be 2.5" to 3". Approximately six weeks after germination, you can water and fertilize the lawn normally.

When properly overseeded, a thin, scruffy-looking lawn can be turned into a thick, lush lawn in just a few weeks.



Complete Renovation - Starting Over

When should you just start over?

Overseeding can renovate a lawn if it has at least 50 percent good, healthy turf. However, if your lawn has less than 50 percent healthy turf, it may be better to kill all the old turf and weeds, and then re-seed the entire lawn: start over.

Many homeowners think that it is a major undertaking to completely renovate their lawn. They believe that it requires major excavation, sod removal, importing new soil, and much more. But, with using herbicides, it can be very SIMPLE to change a lawn from a headache, to a comforting, appealing, 'low maintenance' lawn.

What does it take to completely change a lawn?

It takes about a month of time, and some of the following equipment and materials.

1. A pump sprayer.
2. Killzall or Roundup herbicide (and spreader sticker)
3. Lawnmower
4. Fertilizer spreader
5. Water roller (optional)
6. Sprinkler system (either in-ground or hose-end)
7. Starter fertilizer (16-16-8 or 21-7-7)
8. Grass Seed (a high quality mixture)
9. Peat Moss (optional)
10. Peat Moss Spreader (optional)

Much of the necessary equipment can be rented.

Step 1. Spray the entire existing lawn with Killzall herbicide. Follow directions on the label and make sure you do not miss any spots. Use a spreader sticker, to increase sticking ability of the herbicide. Don't water the lawn for at least 24 hours, but do water it occasionally to keep the grass growing, so the herbicide can work properly.

Step 2. After about a week, the grass should start to die, or may be dead. Spray any areas again that did not die, and that are still actively growing. Repeat spraying, at weekly intervals, until all the grass is dead. Bermuda grass or Quack Grass



may take 4 to 6 applications before it is completely under control. Do not give up and proceed to the next step until you are certain that all the grass is dead.

Note: At this stage, you need to decide if major soil changes or amending is needed. Do you need to add mulch or compost? Do you want to rototill the entire area? Do you need to change the grade of the soil?

Step 3. Once you are satisfied that all the undesirable grass is dead, mow the lawn short. This may require mowing and re-mowing the lawn, reducing the cutting height with each mowing. Collect the cuttings and discard them.



Step 4. Apply a layer of sandy-loam soil to re-level the lawn area if needed. Also, if there are irrigation repairs or alterations to be made, this is a great time to complete them.

Step 5. Lightly loosen the soil surface, or the thatch area with a rake, or by using a power rake. A power rake at this step is much easier than a roto tiller.

Step 6. Reseed with the desired seed mix. Cheap grass seed is not the most economical seed to use when you are renovating. Always buy good, high quality grass seed.

Apply 1/2 of the seed in one direction, and then apply the other 1/2 of the seed at a 90 degree angle.

Step 7. Apply 16-16-8 or 21-7-7 fertilizer at rate of 5 to 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Step 8. (Optional) Apply peat moss or Black Forest Compost on top of the seed. This can be done by hand or with a peatmoss spreader. This layer of mulch helps to keep the seed moist, and helps to reduce the amount of water needed during the germination process.

Step 9. (Optional) Using a water roller, press the seed, fertilizer and peat moss into soil to make good 'seed-to-soil' contact. This may improve the germination.



Step 10. Apply water '2-3-4' times per day for approximately 2 weeks. Keep the area moist. If you miss a day or two, and the seed dries out, you may lose up to 30 percent germination -- they don't tell you that on the seed label.

After 2 to 3 weeks, reduce the frequency of watering the lawn to '1-2-3' times a day. Do not let the grass dry out, but do not keep it too wet.

Step 11. Wait to mow your lawn until it gets approximately 2.5" to 3" tall.

Note: Be Careful With Chemicals. Don't apply any pre-emergent herbicides prior to starting. Wait until the next year before applying any types of pre-emergent herbicides.



Step 12. Don't worry about weeds. A lawnmower is the best herbicide for most weeds. Re-fertilize your lawn six to eight weeks after germination. Don't spray broadleaf herbicides on new grass until it has been mowed at least 3 to 4 times (approximately 2 to 3 months old)

Now your lawn has been changed from a headache to a thing of beauty.

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 choose?

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.

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.

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

If you have not overseeded your lawn in the last 4 to 6 years, it needs to be done now, to make your lawn as nice as brand new sod!

