EC 1021
Reprinted August 1996

Establishing New Lawns by Seeding

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In Western Oregon, the best seasons for seeding a new lawn are mid-spring and early fall. Provided the soil moisture conditions will allow preparation, tilling, grading and leveling, it's easier at those times to keep the seeded area moist, and the temperatures usually are warm enough for germination to occur within a relatively short time.

The advantage of seeding as compared to planting sod is that a larger selection of grasses—particularly those that don't form a dense sod mat—is available for planting.

Soil preparation

When soil moisture conditions permit, plow, disk, spade, or rotary till the soil. By raking or dragging, grade or slope the yard so water will drain away from the house. If additional topsoil is needed, do the grading first, then add the topsoil to the final grade.

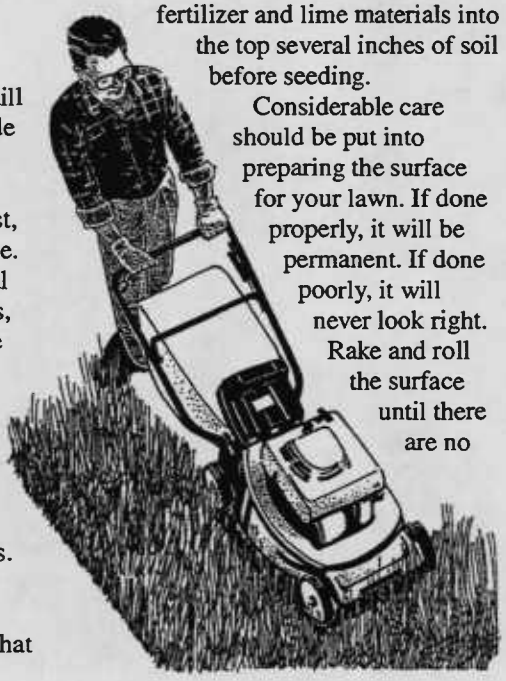
Topsoil should be a loam material free of trash, plant roots, weed seeds, and herbicides. Uniformly distribute topsoil over the graded area. Again, rotary till lightly to mix the added topsoil into the top 1 or 2 inches of the underlying soil.

To determine the amount of fertilizer and lime needed in your soil, it's best to obtain a soil analysis. Your county Extension office can provide instructions. If time doesn't permit this, add fertilizer materials that will supply 2 pounds of actual nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P_2O_5), and potassium (K_2O) per 1,000 square feet. For example, if a complete fertilizer mixture with a 10-10-10 analysis ratio were applied, it would require 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet to supply those minerals. Fertilizers should be applied evenly to the area to be seeded.

Soil analysis will determine lime needs, too. Generally, where soils are extremely acid or heavy clay types, an application of 50 to 80 pounds of ground limestone per 1,000 square feet should be distributed evenly over the area.

Rotary till, spade, or rake the fertilizer and lime materials into the top several inches of soil before seeding.

Considerable care should be put into preparing the surface for your lawn. If done properly, it will be permanent. If done poorly, it will never look right. Rake and roll the surface until there are no hollows or ridges, and the surface is firm enough to walk across without leaving deep tracks.



Planting

When you've prepared a satisfactory surface, lightly roughen the surface by raking. Divide the seed in half. Sow half the seed while walking in one direction, and the other half walking at right angles to the first seeding. Then lightly rake the surface again to partially cover the seeds. Remember that grass seeds are extremely small, and need to be covered only lightly with soil.

If the lawn is planted during the cool, moist spring, a surface mulch usually will be unnecessary. During the drier and warmer fall months, a light mulch covering of bark dust or peat or clean straw will help maintain moisture for rapid seed germination.

To stimulate early growth of the new grass, spread 5 pounds of ammonium sulfate per thousand square feet immediately after seeding and before the final raking, to supply nitrogen near the young seedlings.

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Watering

The most critical step in obtaining good seed germination, and subsequently a dense lawn, is keeping the soil surface moist until the seeds have germinated. If dry weather prevails following seeding, a light watering may be needed every day or several times per day.

As the grass begins growing, gradually decrease the watering frequency while increasing the amount of water being applied at each watering. By the end of the first 6 weeks after seeding, the watering schedule should be on a weekly basis, with about 1 inch of water per application.

Mowing

In Oregon, colonial bent grass readily tolerates mowing at ¾ inch. Fine fescues, perennial ryegrasses, and bluegrasses should be kept from ¾ to 1½ inches high. When the new grass reaches the correct height, begin mowing with a sharp mower. Clip grass frequently enough that the grass blade is clipped no more than one-third its length. The short clippings that result from frequent mowing can be left to decompose in place. Remove long clippings to avoid smothering grass plants underneath.

Fertilizing

Lawn grasses require fertilizer nutrients for pleasing color and healthy growth. Regular fertilization will allow adequate growth to help the lawn stay ahead of weeds and maintain its vigor. Ideal mixtures are high in nitrogen, low in phosphorus, medium in potassium, and medium in sulfur. A typical mixture is 15-5-10-7, 20-2-4-15, or 22-4-4-12. See EC 1278 for detailed information on fertilizing established lawns.

Weeds

New grass plants may be damaged by herbicides used to kill lawn weeds. Generally, it's best to avoid using any herbicides until the lawn is at least 4 to 6 weeks old. After the lawn is established, there are many herbicides you can use to keep weeds to a minimum.

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Hatch, Duane, *Removing Thatch and Aerating Lawns,* EC 1018 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, reprinted 1994). No charge

McNeilan, R. A., *Establishing Lawns by Sodding,* EC 966 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, reprinted 1992). No charge

Cook, T.W., and J.M. Whisler, *Fertilizing Home Lawns,* EC 1278 (Oregon State University, Corvallis, reprinted 1994). 50¢

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This publication was produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties.