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Installing or Renovating a Lawn

The best time to start a lawn from *seed* is April 15 to October 15

A *sod* lawn may be laid at any time, as long as the soil is not frozen.

Seeded lawns are often stronger and more disease resistant than sod lawns.

Installing a New Lawn

Location, Location, Location

A successful lawn requires a good environment for roots and growth. The soil texture should allow for root & water penetration to a depth of 8"-12". The soil should be adequately furnished with nutrients and be neither too acid nor too alkaline. A grass lawn should have at least a half-day of sun.

Soil Preparation

If you are *replacing* an existing lawn, you should remove the old sod first. The easiest way is to spray the existing sod with Round-up or Finale herbicide, wait one week, then remove the sod with a rented sod cutter. If you choose to cultivate the old lawn into the soil, take time to rake out all the large clods. If you are installing your lawn on a patch of weedy ground, spray the weeds first with Round-up or Finale and let the weed roots die before starting soil preparation. (Round-up will kill roots and all).

Rototill the soil to a depth of 8"-12". One of the best types of rototillers for this job is a *rear tine* model with at least 5-8 horsepower. If you need to add topsoil, do so at this time, using the best grade of topsoil you can afford. Blend the topsoil with the existing soil. You may have to till the soil at least 2 to 3 times to get it well mixed. Never add a layer of soil to the top without tilling it in (unless you are adding over 8" of new soil).

Soil Test

It is a good idea to do a soil test at this time to determine the acidity level of the soil. You can purchase inexpensive test kits at our nursery for this purpose. If your soil is *too acidic*, (quite common in our areas) apply **dolomite lime** (Dolopril), following the label directions. If your soil has *high clay* content, add granular **gypsum**. Gypsum helps clay soil particles clump together, which opens up the soil. You will need to add adequate nutrients to the soil to get the grass off to a good start and to support growth until the lawn is established. Use **Northwest Best Premium Lawn Food 21-7-14** or **Turf Royale 21-7-14** and make sure to follow the label directions. Now, rototill the existing soil, any topsoil, lime, gypsum and fertilizer into a nice homogenized blend to a depth of 8"-12".

Seedbed Preparation

Rake and drag the seedbed until it is smooth and clod-free, evening out the high and low spots. Pick out any rocks and sticks and (if possible) slope the lawn slightly away from the house. Using a landscape rake will make the leveling go fairly quickly, but you could also drag a 4"x4" post on a rope over the soil to level out highs and lows. After you finish, water the soil a few times to help it settle, and then rake again. Water the soil one more time, then keep it moist until it is warm enough to plant.

Seeding

Pick a windless day and sow the seeds as evenly as possible using a mechanical spreader or seeder. Cover the seeds with a light coat of compost or soil and roll with a half-full roller to press the seed into the soil. (You may lightly rake the seed into the soil instead of covering it.) Water thoroughly but carefully, as you do not want to wash out the seed or cause runoff channels. Keep the soil dark with moisture but NOT soggy, while the seeds sprout. Mow when the grass reaches about 2" in height. Let the soil dry before mowing so the mower wheels don't rut the surface.

Choosing the correct seed

Your best results will come from using a grass seed mixture. We carry a variety of seed mixtures from our local supplier and will be happy to recommend the best mixture for your conditions. In our Puget Sound region, the best grasses for our lawns are fescues and perennial rye. (Many mass merchandisers sell brands of seed mixes that have too much bluegrass in it for our region.)

Installing a Sod Lawn

Prepare the soil just as you would for a seed lawn, but make the surface about $\frac{3}{4}$ " lower than any surrounding pavement. Spread a layer of fertilizer on the soil surface following label directions, then rake in. Lay the strips of sod with the ends pressed together and the seams staggered like bricks. Roll with a half-filled roller, water thoroughly, and then keep moist until the roots have penetrated deeply into the soil beneath.

Renovating an Existing Lawn

Preparation

First, set your lawn mower to its *lowest* setting and mow your existing grass in the area you want to renovate. Next, de-thatch to open up the lawn and make it more hospitable for the new seed. If the soil in your lawn is compacted, or hard to moisten, aerate it as well. Spread $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of compost or quality topsoil over the lawn and rake it in evenly. Finally, spread 25 pounds of **dolomite lime** (Dolopril) per 2,000 square feet of lawn, and fertilize with either **Northwest Best Premium Lawn Food 21-7-14** (covers 4,200 square feet) or **Turf Royale 21-7-14** (covers 10,000 square feet).

Seeding and Aftercare

Pick a windless day and sow the seeds as evenly as possible using a mechanical spreader or seeder and either rake the seeds lightly into the compost/topsoil, or drag a section of cyclone fencing across the soil surface. Keep the soil dark with moisture, but NOT soggy, while the seeds sprout. You can mow your lawn again once the older grass reaches 3" tall, but set the mower HIGH. In 6-8 weeks, fertilize again.

Ongoing Maintenance

When you mow, set your mower on the high side, as longer grass blades shade the roots and reduce the need for water. Fertilize 4 times a year, and apply lime once a year (this brings our acid soils closer to the neutral soil that lawn grass prefers). Lawns need about 1" of water per week to stay green, whether from rainfall or from your hose. When you do water, water *deeply* and less frequently (it saves water, and is better for the lawn anyway). To know when you've watered enough, place empty tuna cans on the lawn when watering, and stop when the cans have an inch of water in them.

A Few Don'ts

- Don't apply grass seed within three weeks of using moss killer on your lawn.
- Don't use "weed & feed" for at least one year after you seed a lawn.