

## A Guide to Starting a New Lawn

**1) Caring for a New Lawn:** Prepare the area for planting. If you haven't installed your lawn yet follow this basic checklist to get started:

- Remove old grass and weeds using a rake, hoe or sod cutter. If necessary, apply broadleaf herbicide to remove these weeds. Follow label instructions.
- Grade your soil to a 1 or 2% slope running away from buildings.
- Perform a soil test or send soil samples to a local university extension or a garden center that offers soil testing services.
- Improve soil if necessary based on soil test results, then gently rake in starter fertilizer.
- Water the soil and let settle for one week.
- Fill a garden roller  $\frac{1}{2}$  full of water and roll lightly over the soil or rent an aerator to break up the ground.

**2) Choose your grass:** Take your time selecting a grass species.

- Lawn care will be much easier if the grass is suited to your climate, soil type, and use patterns. Research the specific species, not just "cool season" or "warm season" grass.
- **The best time to plant a warm season grass (Bermuda) is in the spring (March – April). Fescue is better planted in the fall (September 15 – October 15).**
- You'll also choose between seed and sod (turf). Seed is cheaper and easier to install, but can take months to become usable. Pick sod if you want a lawn sooner, and are willing to spend the time and effort. Sod should be moist, with no dry or cracked areas.

**3) Install the new lawn:** Break up the lawn into sections to make this task more manageable. Follow these instructions:

- To plant seeds: Using an aerator, make multiple passes pulling up plugs to help aerate the ground. Using a lawn spreader, sow half the seeds walking in parallel rows. Sow the other half in rows at right angles to the first rows. Lightly rake  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch (3 mm) of soil over the seeds.
- To install sod: Remove a few inches of soil, so the new sod will end up level with the surrounding area. Lay the sod end to end in staggered rows, as though laying bricks. Trim edges to fit with a utility knife.

**4) Water the new lawn:** Follow these guidelines to keep a new lawn healthy:

- Seeds: Water right after sowing, lightly to avoid washing away the seeds. Repeat every other day or as often as needed to keep the soil moist, as seeds may die when dried out. This danger has passed once the seed has germinated and grass blades appear, usually about 10–14 days after planting.
- Sod: Water well after installing, then use a full lawn roller to compact the sod against the soil base. From then on, water in the early morning 15-20 days. Water heavily enough to wet the soil underneath the sod, but avoid overwatering that can lift the sod rolls up from the soil.

**5) Stay off the new lawn:** Avoid walking on new sod for the first week after installation, and go easy on it for the first month.

- Seed takes longer to become established. Stay off it until blades appear, then use as lightly as possible for six months.
- Once a seed-grown lawn reaches a height of 2–3 inch (5–7.5cm), roll it with an empty garden roller.
- Do not mow a seed-grown lawn until it is 3 or 4 inches (7.5–10cm) tall, then mow no more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (1.25 cm) every few days until the lawn is healthy and well-established. Fescue lawns should be cut no lower than 4 inches (highest setting on the mower). Grass such as Bermuda, should be cut low, usually half way down on your mower setting.

## A Guide to Maintaining and Established Lawn

**1) Water occasionally but deeply:** Deep roots keep your lawn healthy and lush. Promote root growth by watering heavily, then letting the top 2 inches (5cm) of soil dry out before watering again.

- The exact amount of water per week depends on the grass variety and weather. A good rule of thumb for the growing season is 1–1.5 inches (2.5–3.25 cm) of water per week, rising to 2 inches (5cm) during hot, dry weather.
- Water in late evening or early morning (better) to reduce water loss from evaporation.
- To find out how many inches of water your sprinkler uses, set up open containers around your yard. Run the sprinklers for 20 minutes, then measure the depth of water in each can. Multiply the average depth by three to find the inches per hour.

**2) Let your lawn grow dormant (optional):** Many grass species survive hot, dry summers by going dormant. Their leaves turn brown, but the parts underground stay alive for months.

- If your lawn wilts and turns brown no matter how much you water it, letting it go dormant can be healthier than repeatedly rescuing it from the brink.
- Most dormant grass does not need watering. If the soil is extremely dry or the grass species does not do well in hot weather, give the lawn 0.25–0.5 inches (6–12mm) water every 2–4 weeks.

**3) Mow at the highest setting on your mower:** Cutting fescue grass to a tall height (around 3 1/2 to 4 inches (8.9 to 10.2 cm)) is important for lawn health, especially during summer heat.

- Do not mow within a week of planting new grass. The grass will not have time to grow deep enough roots and can be pulled up by the mower.
- Never mow a wet lawn.
- Sharpen your mower blade after about 10 hours of mowing, or if fresh-mowed grass looks ragged with brown tips. **Do not bag your grass, rake, blow or remove the clippings. Let them lay on the turf for mulch.**
- Mow in a different direction or pattern than your last mow to help the grass grow more evenly.

**4) Choose a fertilizer:** The three numbers on the fertilizer bag tell you the percentage of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, in that order.

- Nitrogen is the most important for your lawn, and should be higher than the other two (a 3:1:2 ratio is ideal). Avoid numbers higher than 10, since these can easily burn your lawn.
- Ideally, choose a mixture of 30–50% slow-release fertilizer and 70–50% fast release fertilizer.
- Organic fertilizers are better than synthetic fertilizers, since they improve soil health as well.

**5) Fertilize your lawn:** If you don't have a fertilizer spreader, rent one from a tool rental company.

- A drop spreader works best for small lawns. Do this once a year, preferable in late fall when the cool weather promotes root growth instead of leggy growth.
- To avoid stripes of uneven color, set the spreader to ½ the recommended setting and walk over the lawn twice
- Put on gloves and hand spread fertilizer in corners, edges and small, tight areas
- If you want the perfect lawn, you may fertilize three or four times per growing season. It's easy to burn your lawn or cause excessive quick growth with this strategy. For best results, contact a local university extension for advice specific to your climate.

**6) Aerate your yard in fall or spring:** Annual de-thatching and aeration is very important for the health of your lawn.

- Once a year, remove plugs of soil using a lawn aerator with ½ in (1.25 cm) diameter tines.
- Aerate while the soil is on the dry side, but just wet enough to allow the tines to penetrate.

\*for more information please visit the website below\*

**Further Lawn Care Services:** You can Google or research many different sources of lawn care services. Try Scott's Official Page for a starter. They provide many resources as well as programs to help you get started and properly maintain your new lawn. They can design a program for proper annual care of your lawn providing detailed instructions and products and the time of year for applications.

**Planting Shrubs and Trees:** There are many resources to find out how to properly plant shrubs and trees. (Google "How to properly plant shrubs and trees" and many videos and resources will come up).

Most plants are dormant during the winter and it's best to plant them from December to February. During the dormant season, they are not growing as much, therefore their root systems aren't as active or needing water like in the spring and summer.

Pick a plant for the location you have in mind. Full sun, partial sun/shade or full shade will make a difference in the plant you choose. Plants which like full sun, may not do as well in shady areas. Likewise, shady plants may die in full sun.

Find out the size of the tree or shrub. How big will it get, or small? Does it provide what your intentions may be (shade, color, shape, etc.)? Make sure you don't plant a tree too close to your house, which may cause issues with leaves or branches too close to your house, drop leaves in the gutters, or cause foundation issues.

Before you plant, know where your utility lines are (water, sewer, gas, electrical, cable, etc.). You can call 811 (No Cuts) prior to any digging and they'll mark the utility lines in your yard.

Plants are usually sold in plastic containers or pots. Make sure you dig your hole at least twice the width of the container (a container 12 inches wide will need a hole at least 24 inches wide) and no deeper than the top of the root ball or container. Make sure you break up the dirt you removed and add mulch or other types of additives to loosen the soil around the newly planted root ball. When removing the root ball from the plastic container, use your palm or other object to loosen the dirt and roots within the container. Carefully remove the root ball and use your fingers or other object to break apart the roots (roots become "root bound" while in pots for too long). Breaking the roots free also allows the dirt or mulch to fall out into the hole. This can be used to amend the soil for better planting.

Place your root ball into the hole. Make sure the roots are loose and can grow outwards. Pull some of the removed dirt (and mulch mixture) back into the hole, filling it about halfway and lightly packing. Add some water at this time to settle the dirt/mulch mixture. Add the remaining mixture making sure not to cover the trunk of the plant. Pull some of the mixture away from the base to form a ring around the plant. This will help hold water in place and direct it to the roots below. You can add mulch or other decorative ground cover at this time as well to top off the plant base. This helps control weeds and retain moisture.

Water well initially and then every 2-3 days, as needed. Don't add too much water and water slowly. Don't over saturate the hole (this may cause the plant to drown if the hole does not drain well). Water as needed for the first 2-3 weeks and as needed the first several months, especially during hot dry summer days. By the next fall/winter, the plant should have survived and will once again be dormant over the winter.