

# HOME & GARDEN

## Take care with lawn planting

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Recorder Columnist

A beautiful lawn, thickly growing and neatly clipped, is the inevitable horticultural necessity a new householder sets out to acquire. He may not know a daisy from a rose — flower gardens will be beyond his ken — he can buy vegetables easily at the market, but he must start the lawn immediately.

Mid-August to mid-September is the ideal time to plant a lawn, and I would like to remind homeowners that, while a lawn is often taken for granted, it will be around as long as the clump birches and maples, so it will pay to take a little extra care right from the beginning.

The perfect soil for a lawn is rich in organic matter, well-drained and very nearly neutral or only slightly acid. Of course, what we have to work with often falls somewhat short of the ideal in one respect or another, but there are ways around the problems.

### BETWEEN THE ROWS

Creating a soil that is rich and humusy means starting work on the lawn in the spring before the fall when you will plant the seed. Manure can be brought in and spread, and a cover crop planted that will be tilled in later. If manure is not available, plant the cover crop alone.

Any other organic supplements that you have available can be added: compost, peat moss, bone or cottonseed meal. At this stage of preparation the Ph level of the soil should be tested, and if it falls below 5.5, the soil should be limed. Most lawn grasses prefer a Ph that falls between 6 and 7 (7 is neutral). After the lawn is established you should monitor the Ph level because it will need liming from time to time, but a single application of lime should not exceed 25-50 pounds per 1,000 square feet of turf. In the fall, the lawn area should be tilled and raked so that the grading is smooth and uniform. To insure good coverage with the seed, you should make two passes. Walk across the yard traveling from north to south (for instance), broadcasting the seed or using a seed spreader (a small garden machine that can be used to spread lime and fertilizer as well as seed), and then cross the yard again at right angles to the first pass — from east to west. This will give you complete and even coverage. You will probably use 4 to 6 pounds of grass seed per 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Lightly rake the seed into the soil. Do not bury it deeply or you will lower the germination rate. After a light raking the soil can be rolled. Then water the new lawn gently and keep it well watered for the month or so it will take to become established.

When the grass has reached a height of 2 inches, it should be mowed with a mower (make sure the blades are sharp and will not tear or damage the tender leafy stems), and cut the grass to a height of 1½ inches. Do not cut the grass any shorter, and make sure it is no taller than 2 inches going into the winter.

The short grass clippings that are cut need not be raked up. Last year when I spoke to Dr. Hurto at the University of Massachusetts, he told me that the latest research showed that a lawn fertilized only with its own clippings did just as well as one given feedings of chemical fertilizers. The only caveat is to mow the grass often so that the clippings are always short and do not lay heavily and densely on the new lawn.

A major element in the success of a lawn is the selection of seed. Lawns are not planted to a single variety of grass. Seed mixtures will contain "nurse" varieties that will grow quickly and give a good appearance early as well as the grasses that mature slowly but that provide the rich, dense growth that is the sign of a high quality lawn.

Look on the grass-seed package label for a listing of the varieties of grass that the mixture contains. Most mixtures will contain varieties of Kentucky bluegrass like Rugby, Newport, Nugget and Majestic. Bluegrasses are excellent lawn grasses, especially if given a lot of sun and a good soil. However, they will not thrive in the shade, on poor soils or in excessive heat and drought. Still, it is a persistent grass, even though it is slow to become established, and here in the north-east a grass mixture that is about 50 percent bluegrass is desirable.

Fine fescues are very adaptable grasses and do well in drought and shade. They are also very tough, so if you have an area that will get heavy traffic and rough use, try planting a mixture that contains a good percentage of the fescues. Illahee and Pennlawn creeping red fescues are superior varieties. Biljar and Scaldis are two varieties that are especially tolerant of drought.

Perennial rye grasses will grow quickly, but they should never make up more than 20 percent of a fine grass seed mixture.

A patch of neatly cared for lawn around a house is a real asset. It reduces dust, heat and noise; soothes the eye and calms the spirit. Take a little care with yours.

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