

CREATING A NEW LAWN

New lawns can be started from seeds or rolls of sod. With sod an instant lawn is produced. Reputable sod growers offer choice varieties that are free of weeds and pests. Sodding avoids the early weeks of getting a new lawn laid down and established; but it does not diminish the requirements for maintaining the grass.

THE SOIL BED: You can buy topsoil or mix in organic material such as peat moss to improve existing soil. The many fine rootlets that grass develops each year in the top few inches of lawn will also help to improve the structure of the soil.

SOIL-BED PREPARATION: Loosening compacted soil is essential. Remove all foreign materials. Do not bury them, since that may alter the chemical balance of the soil. Cultivate to loosen the soil uniformly a few inches deep. Mix in a complete fertilizer that is relatively rich in phosphorous.

CULTIVATION: Cultivate to break up large clumps. Excessive cultivation however, may cause soil-structure deterioration. It can break down the soil particles to such a small size that the surface will "melt" when heavily watered, sealing the pores of the soil and keeping the water from soaking in. Lawn seeds are best situated for quick, effective sprouting if they sift into the crevices between soil lumps about as big as the tip of a finger.

ROLLING: If the soil has not been unduly fluffed, rolling may not be needed at this stage. Rolling can undo the benefits of cultivation; and even if only lightly done, it can mash down the soil particles, making the surface less permeable. However, rolling will do no damage to sandy soils, and it may be necessary in order to re-establish capillary action that will transport water to deeper levels. It may also be necessary on heavy soils that have become unduly fluffy during preparation.

SODDING: Sod is laid down in strips like pieces of carpet. The soil must be prepared as thoroughly as it would be for a seeded lawn.

1. Open out each turf roll and press it firmly into position.
2. Stand on a plank on the first row; lay the second, staggering the sections.
3. Roll the plank over onto the second row and lay the third row.
4. Roll the lawn twice, the second time at right angles to the first.
5. Sweep the lawn to remove debris and to lift the flattened grass.
6. Trim the edges with a half-moon edging tool, making a sloping cut.

SEEDING:

1. To ensure good drainage, grade soil to slope slightly away from the house in all directions, if possible. If you add topsoil, spread it over the surface evenly. Eliminate bumps or high spots where a mower might cut the grass too short, and fill any low spots where rainwater tends to collect or where a mower might miss.
2. Till the soil enough to loosen it, but do not whip it into a fine fluff. Pea-sized lumps and crevices should remain to catch the tiny seeds. Remove stones and other debris, and work in soil additions, such as peat moss, gypsum or lime. Grade the soil once more; then wet it to firm it down.
3. Spread the grass seeds with a lawn spreader. The rate varies with the type of grass, but do not seed too thickly. The young plants need space to develop roots and leaves; if overcrowded, they may begin to fade in a few weeks.
4. Rake the seeds lightly with the back of a bamboo rake. Barely cover about half the total amount with soil, leaving the rest exposed. Then roll just once with an empty roller, to press seeds into contact with soil. Do not cover seeds completely, they must have light to sprout, as well as warmth, oxygen and moisture.
5. Apply a complete fertilizer on the same day the seeds are spread. Use a fertilizer recommended for new lawns, in the amount suggested on the bag. Grass seeds themselves contain only enough nourishment to form the first sprout and roots; so added nutrients are necessary for further growth.
6. Keep the area thoroughly moist for at least two weeks, or until the grass is well established. Avoid light sprinkling; the moisture should penetrate the soil to a depth of several inches. If possible, the sprinklers should be set to cover the entire seeded area without having to be moved, so as not to disturb seeds.
7. Mow the grass as soon as it is about 2-1/2" high. (Mow only when the lawn is completely dry). Cutting height is important. Do not cut shorter than 2" the first year. Rake up and remove the clippings, or attach a grass catcher to the mower.
8. Do not be alarmed if weeds appear. Almost all soils, even screened topsoil contain weed seeds, but many weeds will die off after weekly mowing begins. Others can be eliminated the second year with "weed and feed" mixtures, or prevented with early- spring use of pre-emergent controls.