

## ESTABLISHING A NEW LAWN

There are three methods of establishing lawns in the Inland Northwest: seeding, hydroseeding and sodding.

### SEEDING

#### Advantages

- More grass types and varieties are available.
- It is less expensive than hydroseeding or sodding.
- Stronger initial root system development.

#### Concerns

- Initial establishment takes longer.
- Time of seeding is limited mainly to late summer and early fall or mid spring after soil temperatures reach 50°F.
- It is necessary to supply consistent moisture to young seedlings.

### HYDROSEEDING

Hydroseeding involves mixing seed, fiber mulch and fertilizer together in a mixing tank. This mixture is then sprayed through a large hose and nozzle over the prepared seedbed.

#### Advantages

- An effective method for applying seed on hills prone to erosion and windy sites where seed can be blown away. It also works well on flat protected areas.
- The seed is mixed with water and the mulch holds the moisture, so hydroseeded lawns come up quickly.
- Some companies will custom mix your seed selection.

#### Concerns

- Hydroseeded lawns require the same care and watering of young seedlings as a seeded lawn.

### SODDING

#### Advantages

- Rapid establishment of a lawn.
- Good for slopes or areas prone to erosion.
- Can be installed any time during the growing season.

## Concerns

- Expensive to install.
- Less selection or control over the kinds of grasses installed.

## SOIL PREPARATION

Whether seeding, hydroseeding or sodding, proper preparation of the soil before planting will simplify maintenance and ensure a healthier turf in the future.

If building a new home, ask to have the existing topsoil pushed aside. This can be spread evenly back over the surface once the rough grading around the house is done. Trees, shrubs and lawns never develop to their full potential in poor grade subsoil. If saving existing soil is not possible, some effort should be put into amending poor quality soil.

The best type of soil for growing turf is sandy loam (mostly sand with some silt and clay). Native Inland Northwest soils vary greatly. There are regional differences as well as variations within one property. Because we have low rainfall and few native deciduous trees to add humus to the soil, the organic matter is low. Generally the pH falls between 6.8 to 7.2. It is possible to grow a good lawn within this pH range.

## ESTABLISHING A LAWN BY SEEDING

### Prepare seedbed

Rototill or spade the site to be seeded and remove rock and debris from the ground surface. Go over the site to the depth of 6 to 8 inches, breaking up the soil into smaller pieces so that it can be graded. *Do not pulverize the soil until it looks like powder. This destroys the soil structure and leaves the soil susceptible to compaction and poor water infiltration.*

### Add soil amendments

Adding organic matter to clay soils before seeding will improve drainage and aeration. The same organic amendments added to sandy soil will help hold water and nutrients in the soil. Apply a 2–4 inch layer of organic matter such as peat moss, compost, bagged steer manure, or any well-decayed compost from a nursery or soil yard. Till these materials into the top 4-6 inches of soil.

Using a hand rake, level the high and low spots. To provide drainage, slope the surface away from the house, allowing at least a 2-inch drop every 100 feet. Grade the edges flush with sidewalks and driveways. The soil will settle slightly once it is irrigated.

### Add starter fertilizer

With a fertilizer spreader, make a uniform application of 10 pounds 10-20-20 per 1000 square feet to be seeded. Incorporate the fertilizer evenly into the soil to a depth of 1-2 inches.

### Perform the finish grading

Rake the area to the finish grade before seeding. Use a water roller one-quarter filled with water to lightly firm the soil. *(Rollers can be rented at most hardware or rental companies.)* The soil should be firm but not packed.

### Apply seed

Divide the amount of seed to be sown into two. Using a small handheld fertilizer/seeder, calibrate the seeder to deliver half the amount of seed in one pass over the area. Spread the second half of seed at right angles to the first seeding.

### Rake or drag to cover seed lightly

Rake the seed to cover it with 1/8 to 1/4 inch of soil. Roll lightly to make contact between seed and soil.

### **Mulch**

A light covering of peat moss, fine compost or purchased mulching material will reduce moisture loss from wind and heat. When mulch is added, roll the roller again lightly at right angles to the first rolling.

### **Water**

Newly seeded lawns require special irrigation. A newly seeded lawn requires daily watering and may need as many as four light watering a day if conditions are dry and windy. Keep the soil bed moist (but not saturated) to a depth of 1 to 2 inches until germination occurs. Continue to water two to four times a day. As seedlings reach 2 inches, gradually reduce the watering frequency and water more deeply. After the new lawn has been mowed two or three times begin deep and infrequent watering.

### **Mowing**

Mow the new lawn just as soon as there is enough grass to cut. This is approximately three weeks after planting. Mow at the height appropriate to your turfgrass. Refer to mowing heights chart in C069, Work Saving Tips for Lawns. Until the lawn is well established, let the soil surface dry out for a day or two before mowing. This allows the ground to firm up and will prevent ruts in the lawn.

### **Controlling weeds**

Do not use herbicides on your new lawn unless there is a serious weed problem. Frequent mowing and proper starter fertilizer may be the only weed management needed. A low rate of a product containing 2,4-D can be used after 3 or 4 mowings if broadleaf weeds appear to be overpowering the new lawn.

## **ESTABLISHING A LAWN BY HYDROSEEDING**

Be sure that proper soil preparation is part of the contract with the hydroseeding company. If it isn't, follow soil preparation instructions in this article.

## **ESTABLISHING A LAWN BY SODDING**

Sod is commercial grown turf and is traditionally laid by commercial landscapers. It usually comes in 3-foot sections, 18 inches wide, with less than 1/2 inch of soil attached. Choose high quality sod that is actively growing. Sod should not remain on the pallet for more than a few hours. The presence of mildew and yellowing leaves indicate that sod may have been stacked too long.

If installing it yourself, start with a straight edge such as a driveway or sidewalk. Unroll sod pieces tightly against each other but do not overlap. Using a sharp knife, cut pieces to fit curves or small areas. After the sod has been laid, roll it to ensure good contact with the soil.

The first irrigation requires about 1 inch of water to achieve complete wetting of the sod and at least 1 inch of soil. After watering lift up edges of sod at several locations to be sure water has penetrated the sod and soil below.

Continue watering one or two times a day to prevent sod from wilting and keep the soil moist. As sod becomes established, gradually reduce the frequency of watering but wet the soil deeper. *Do not saturate the sod and soil to the point of standing water. New roots could begin to rot under these conditions.* After sod has been mowed two or three times, water deeply and infrequently depending on the weather and soil conditions.

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Revised January 2009