



tips from Turtle Creek

RESEEDING AN EXISTING LAWN

"Grass covers all," said Robert Frost; but why not in my yard, you might ask? The biggest reason is because the cool season grasses like Kentucky-31 Tall Fescue which we use in the Piedmont are clump grasses that have almost no spreading tendency. Therefore, every few years, we must overseed an existing yard to keep it looking good. Let's take a look at what we have to do to renovate our existing yard. Follow these directions and you should have a beautiful, lush green lawn that will be a valuable asset to your home.

TIMING Fall and spring are the best times to reseed. You will get better results, however, if you can do it in the fall. Try to get your seed planted in September or October if you are doing fall planting and in March and April if you are doing spring seeding.

SEED In our area Kentucky-31 Tall Fescue is the most popular grass grown. This is a tough lawn grass that stays green most of the year. It is a coarse textured grass that tends to clump and has almost no spreading tendency, so it must be overseeded regularly to remain thick. Tall fescue's greatest problem is that it will not thrive in full shade. There are other varieties of fine fescues such as Fine Lawn that are now beginning to be used in our area. For fescue lawns we recommend Pennington Pencoted K-31 Fescue grass seed. This seed has a hormonal coating which protects the seeds from fungus, insects, and improves germination. K-31 seed should be planted at a rate of 5-7 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. if you are overseeding a lawn. Multiply the length of your yard by the width to determine the square footage you have.

There are now many good grass seed mixtures available that will give you a finer textured lawn. Many of these are specially formulated for shady areas. These blends usually contain some fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, creeping and/or red fescue. Turtle Creek recommends Pennington Piedmont Green which is an excellent seed mixture. We will be glad to help you decide the best seed for your lawn.

LAWN PREPARATION Mow your yard to a height of about 1 inch. Now you will have to remove any thatch that has built up in the lawn so the seed can get to the dirt. This can be done with a good steel garden rake or a thatching rake on a small yard or with a dethatching machine or a verticut mower on a larger yard. These machines will cut little slices out of the soil and lift the thatch to the top. An aerator can also be used to make the yard ready for the seed. In our clay an aerator can only be used effectively when the ground is somewhat moist. They will not penetrate our dry clay. All the loose grass and debris you get must be raked up and removed from the lawn. You should have a rather bare looking, close cropped yard at this time.

FERTILIZER AND LIME It is a good idea to take a soil sample and send to Raleigh to find the correct levels of fertilizer and lime needed for your particular yard if the time is available (usually about 3 weeks). Your county extension service will be glad to supply these kits to you or we have them at Turtle Creek.

Generally, in our soil, you should use a good fertilizer before planting. A starter fertilizer that is high in phosphorous which causes good root growth is preferable. The Scott's Starter is a good one and so is the Pennington Lawn Starter. These will adequately feed your new and old grass if you follow the directions on the bag.

Add lime to your yard now. Use the soil test results, if possible, to determine the correct amount. Otherwise, a good rule of thumb for lime is 50 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. when reseeding. The lime can be pelletized, granular, or powder.

SOWING SEED Follow the directions on the package to obtain maximum results from the seed mixtures. Every mixture is a little different. If you are using K-31 fescue seed, you should put out 5-7 lbs. of seed per 1,000 sq. ft. Do not skimp on seed! Grass seed should be put out with a spreader. If possible make 2 passes over the area at right angles to each other. This insures total coverage. Lightly rake the area you have just seeded to insure good contact between the seed and the soil. Try not to move the seed around too much, but only to cover it with 1/8 to 1/4 inch of soil. Use a little heavier rate of seeding on the totally bare spots. If you can get the material, it is a good idea to broadcast sand, topsoil, peat moss, or some similar material lightly over the seed. This will give the seed good soil contact.

Cover any totally bare areas with straw spreading it thin enough to be able to see some of the soil through the mulch. It is not necessary to remove the straw since it will rot rapidly. Do not put straw in areas where there is existing grass still growing.

WATERING Improper watering probably causes more grass failure than any other factor in reseeding. To get good, even germination, the top layer of soil must stay moist. You should water as soon as the seeding is finished to get the soil good and moist. Then sprinkle your yard several times a day as needed to keep it moist (not wet) until the young grass is up and growing. Frequent sprinkling is necessary if it is hot or windy. Do not let the soil get dry or crusty! Keep your lawn watered well for the next several months, especially if you planted in the spring. Between 1 and 2 inches of water is necessary to wet the ground 4-6 inches deep.

MOWING Mow your lawn when the new grass is about 3 inches high to a height of about 2½ inches. Your cool season grasses should be kept at a height of about 3 inches. Be sure to keep fallen leaves off the new grass since they will smother its fine new blades.

A second feeding may be given about 6 weeks after your grass seed is up. Scott's Turf Builder or Penninton Fescue Food are both good choices for this feeding.

NOTES FOR SHADY LAWNS Your shade problem can be minimized by the following suggestions:

1. Fertilize the grass under trees at 1½ times the normal rate.
2. Fertilize the trees deeply.
3. Water the area deeply and regularly (every 2 weeks or so).
4. Keep the PH favorable to grass with adequate lime.
5. Remove low limbs and prune trees to let more light reach grass.
6. Mow slightly higher than normal.
7. Remove leaves and debris promptly.
8. Use some other ground cover if you have over 50% shade in that area.