



tips from Turtle Creek

SEEDING A NEW LAWN

Your lawn is probably the most important part of your landscape. Certainly, more time is spent working on the lawn! A lawn requires regular attention to stay at it best. Let's take a look at what's necessary to seed a new lawn. Follow these directions and you will have a beautiful, lush green lawn that will be a valuable asset to your home.

TIMING Fall and spring are the best times to seed a new lawn. Fall, however, will give a stronger, more permanent stand of grass since we are using cool-season grass varieties here in the Piedmont. In the fall try to plant in Sept. and Oct. For spring planting aim at the time between March 15 and April 15.

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 now beginning to be used in our area. For fescue lawns we recommend Pennington Penkoted 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 8-10 pounds per 1,000 sq. ft. Multiply the length of your yard by the width to determine the square footage you have.

There are also 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 tall 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 on the best seed for your lawn.

SOIL PREPARATION Make certain your yard slopes away from the house and that the grade is suitable to distribute water away from the foundation. It is much more difficult to change the grade after the lawn is established. Be sure that all building debris has been cleared away and that no trash is buried right under the surface of the ground.

In our clay soil you should add some supplementary materials to make the soil more porous. The best soil texture can be obtained by adding 2 inches of amendment material and tilling these into the soil 6-8 inches deep. This material can be compost, peat moss, aged manure, rotted sawdust, shredded bark, sand, topsoil, or a combination of these materials. If you can't afford 2 inches, do use as much as you can. Every little bit helps! The ground should be plowed to a depth of 6-8 inches. Then, smooth the area with a rake removing or breaking up all the large soil clumps on the surface. The seed bed should be smooth and powdery, contoured to the final desired grade.

FERTILIZER AND LIME The fertilizer and lime can be worked into the soil or spread on the top of the final seed bed. 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 when planting. A starter fertilizer that is high in phosphorous which causes good root growth is preferable. The Scott's Starter is a good fertilizer and so is the Pennington Lawn Starter. These will adequately feed your new lawn if you follow the directions on the bag.

Add lime to your seedbed at this time. Use the soil-test results, if possible, to determine the correct amount. Otherwise, a good rule of thumb for lime is 50 to 100 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. The lime can be pelletized, granulated, 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 8-10 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. Do not skimp on seed! Grass seed should be put out with a spreader. Make at least 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. The whole area can be rolled at this stage if the equipment is available.

Now cover the whole area with clean straw to hasten germination. Straw keeps the soil moist and stops it from crusting over or eroding. Use about 1-2 bales of straw per 1,000 sq. ft. The straw should be thin enough to see some of the soil through the mulch. It is not necessary to remove the straw for it will rot very rapidly.

WATERING Improper watering probably causes more grass failure than any other factor in new lawns. 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 bed 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 and crusty! Keep your new lawn watered well for the first 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. Once a week should be sufficient watering if it is done to this depth.

MOWING Mow your new lawn when it is about 3 inches high to a height of 2 1/2 inches. Your cool-season grasses should be kept at a height of about 3 inches. Be sure to keep falling leaves off the new lawn since they will smother its fine new blades of grass.

A second feeding may be given about 6 weeks after your grass seed is up. Scott's Turf Builder or Pennington 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 1 1/2 to 2 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.