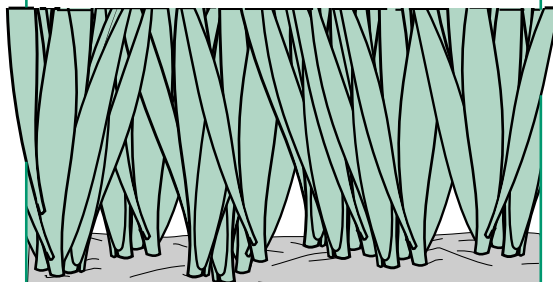


OVERSEEDING COOL-SEASON LAWNS

Turfgrass



Steps to Overseeding a Lawn

- Determine cause of lawn decline
- Test soil for pH and fertility
- Mow the lawn short, 1–1½ inches
- Prepare turf and soil before seeding
- Seed at the right time
- Use latest recommended varieties
- Sow seed uniformly at correct rate
- Fertilize on basis of soil test
- Keep newly seeded area moist
- Reduce watering after grass is up

Hot weather, weeds, insects, and disease often take their toll on lawns by the end of the summer. Fall is the best time to renew bluegrass and fescue lawns. Overseeding is more than scattering seed and waiting for it to germinate. Seedbed preparation is as important for overseeding as it is for establishment of new turf. So before scattering expensive seed, take time to prepare the turf and correct any problems.

Determine the problem

The first step in renovating a lawn is to determine and correct the conditions causing the problem. If this is not done, the problem will likely occur again.

Common causes of thin lawns

Poor soil
Thatch (over ½ inch)
Insects
Disease
Wrong grass
Old varieties
Improper care

Eliminate Weed Problems

The best weed control is planting at the right time and maintaining a thick stand of grass. Plant in September and then fertilize, water, and mow to establish the grass before next spring when weeds invade the turf.

- Do not use crabgrass preventers before seeding or on young grass. Tupersan (siduron) is the exception.
- Do not use broadleaf weed killers (2,4-D, MCP, or dicamba) 1 month before seeding or on new grass until it has been mowed three times.
- Roundup can be used to kill all vegetation before seeding (5-day waiting period).

Mow the Lawn

Mow the lawn short, 1½ inches before overseeding to keep grass and weeds from competing with new seedlings. Short mowing helps prevent the seed from lodging in tall grass and lets light reach the new seedlings. Use a grass catcher on the mower or sweep up excess clippings. Do not scalp off all vegetation—some is needed to protect the germinating seed from wind, hot sun, and heavy rain.

Prepare the Turf and Soil

To get the seed into the soil, cut through the remaining vegetation and open the soil. High thatch levels have a detrimental effect on high maintenance turf. It is important to have less than ¼ inch of thatch when overseeding. If thatch is ¾ inch or more, it is easier to strip off the thatch with a sod cutter and reseed. A power rake, available at most nurseries and rental

agencies, can be used. Choose a heavy-duty machine with solid, thin blades ($\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ inch). Thick blades damage and beat the turf, rather than slice, the soil. Set the machine to cut grooves $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch deep.

Power-rake in two directions at right angles to each other. The soil should be moist, but neither too wet nor too dry for power raking. If the machine does not have a catcher, the debris will have to be raked up and removed.

A core aerator, available from nurseries or rental agencies, pulls plugs of soil from the turf and gives the seed a place to germinate and establish. Core aerators are especially useful for clay soil or compacted ground. Go over the turf three to five times.

What Kind of Grass?

Selecting the exact grass for the right situation is necessary for a successful lawn. Overseeding is an opportunity to change the grass species or to add an improved selection. Check with the County Extension Office for the latest recommendations on improved grasses based on University research.

When to Seed?

September is the best time to seed. This is when nature establishes cool-season grasses; therefore, the best results with the least amount of work occur at that time. Do not delay seeding or the grass will not establish sufficiently before winter and weeds like henbit and chickweed become a problem. March and April are second choices for seeding.

How Much Seed to use?

Seeding Rates	
Kentucky Bluegrass	2–3 pounds
Tall fescue	6–8 pounds
Perennial ryegrass	5–6 pounds

How to Sow the Seed

Use a rotary or drop-type grass seeder rather than applying the seed by hand. Rotary seeders are faster than the drop type. Be sure the seeder is set properly to apply the correct amount.

If the soil has been furrowed with a power rake or prepared with other equipment, it will not be necessary to cover the seed after sowing. Watering will settle it into the soil.

Water is Vital

The seedbed must be continually moist during seed germination. If the germinating seeds or seedlings dry out even briefly, they will die.

Water with a gentle spray so as not to dislodge, wash, or move the seeds around while they are germinating. Daily watering will be necessary at first, then gradually return to a normal watering schedule.

Overseeding Small Patches

If only a few spots need to be reseeded, they can be prepared with a hand rake. Sow the seed uniformly by hand. A thin layer of fine soil can be spread over the seed or it can be worked in with the rake.

Professional Help

Many nurseries and lawn professionals have special equipment to place seed into the soil without disrupting existing turf. Ask for a price estimate, and have the lawn planted during the ideal seeding time.

Fertilizing

New seedlings should grow as much as possible before winter. Apply a fertilizer indicated by a soil test or a complete slow release fertilizer during seeding to get the seedlings off to a rapid start. Avoid soluble fertilizers or excessive amounts of fertilizer because they will burn and kill the new seedlings. Fertilize about 4 to 6 weeks after seeding with nitrogen to sustain growth and build up food reserves in the root system. This makes the new grass winter hardy and green-up earlier in the spring. November is the last month to fertilize.

Care After Grass Establishment

Mow new cool-season grass as soon as it is 3 inches tall with the mower set at 2 inches. Continue to mow at that height for the remainder of the season, including the last mowing. Fertilize with nitrogen 4 to 6 weeks after planting. Then, soak the lawn thoroughly when the weather is dry. Also, water once or twice during dry winters when the soil is not frozen.

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