Growing the Most Beautiful Lawn
In the Neighborhood
Part Three
Care and Maintenance

Irrigation for New Installation of Turfgrass Sod

Adequate moisture is necessary to promote optimum growth, density, color and durability of your turf grass. Water sod lightly after each 200 square feet is installed to prevent wilting or water shock. Once installation is complete, soak the entire area thoroughly. Keep the lawn soaked for the first week.

During extreme heat, water four to five times a day for short periods. In the second week, cut back to once or twice a day. Be sure the sod has ample moisture. Do not assume that if the soil under the sod is wet that the sod has enough moisture. Make your judgement call based on the moisture in the pad of the new sod.

After the first two weeks, roots have grown into the soil below and can pick up some of the moisture necessary to support the survival of the sod. Watering can now be reduced to encourage deeper root development into the soil.

Care must be taken to provide adequate water in accordance to heat, wind, humidity and sun as you begin to make the transition from frequent water to somewhat infrequent watering. This transition period will last an additional two to four weeks. As the roots develop deeper, the grass can go longer periods of time between water applications. Good wisdom and judgement must prevail as you make the transition from the water demands of newly installed sod to that of an established lawn.

The best lawns will result from deep and infrequent watering. The amount and frequency of watering depends on soil type, climate and topographic features.

Our other guide; Watering: When and How Much is a guide to help determine how to water your lawn as at matures.

Fertilization

Fertilization applications are necessary for a healthy, dense, pest free, durable and attractive lawn. In general, established lawn require nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), Potassium (K), and sulfur (S). Suggested formulas may be 20-10-10-5 or 25-10-10-13. Nitrogen promotes green color, tillering and leaf growth and is necessary for protein formation. Phosphorous is essential for cell development and root growth. Potassium promotes vigor, disease resistance and water hardiness. Sulfur is involved in protein synthesis, growth and color. In certain situations, additions of some minor elements such as iron and zinc may be required.

Fertilization continued …

Fertilization should be applied three time a year. The first application should be applied in mid to late September and should supply 1/3 of the yearly nutrients. A second 1/3 application should follow after all mowing has stopped; approximately very late October to early November, depending of fall weather into winter. The last 1/3 of the annual fertilizer total is best applied in mid to late May and should contain nitrogen in a slow soluble form. To enhance and prolong good green color, the spring formulation should also contain some iron sulfate. If not, it can be supplied separately during warmer weather to promote greening without additional increases in the foliar growth rate.

These fertilizer recommendations are for medium to heavy textured soils. Application rates and intervals between applications need to be adjusted to match turf grass requirements. It is best to consult with experienced turf grass managers to obtain proper recommendations.

Mowing

Proper mowing is necessary to maintain the appearance, health, vigor and density of the lawn. When to mow should be determined by the species and variety, growth rate and cutting height – not by the calendar. More frequent mowing is required during rapid growth periods in the spring and fall than during mid-summer.

Set the mower cutting bar by first placing the mower on a smooth surface, such as a sidewalk, and measure the bar height with a small ruler. Mow frequently enough that you remove only 1/3 of the grass height at any one mowing. For example, to maintain your lawn at a 2” height, mow the grass when it reaches 3”. Close mowing stresses the plant and depletes root reserves. Allowing the turf grass to grow tall causes open, stemmy, poor density turf.

To maintain an attractive, well-groomed lawn, keep mowing blades very sharp at all times. Dull blades shred and bruise the leaves, causing light brown tips on the grass blades. Damaged grass is more susceptible to stress and disease than healthy grass.

The return of grass clippings to the lawn, and eventual soil, have been considered to be a naturally accepted part of maintaining a lawn by turf experts. Grass clippings are a valuable resource. The clippings usually contain over 4% nitrogen, about 2% potassium and 1/2% phosphorous, as well as lesser amounts of other essential plant nutrients. By recycling the clippings, the need for fertilizing and subsequent problems with surface and groundwater pollution are reduced.

Grass clippings are rapidly decomposed by bacteria and fungi, and do not contribute to thatch. Thatch results from the abnormal fast growth of tissue high in lignin, such as roots, rhizomes, stolons and crowns.

For most lawns, there is no need to remove the clippings from the lawn as long as they are small enough to work down into the grass. Clippings that are too long remain on the turf and can pack it down damaging the growing plant. These clippings should be racked off to allow the grass to continue growing. Compost the clippings, provided that herbicides have not been applied to the lawn. Use the compost to fertilize the lawn and gardens.

Weed Control

Proper lawn maintenance practices are the most important form of weed control for a home lawn. Thick, densely growing turf keeps weeds problems to a minimum, and proper fertilizing, mowing, watering, aerification and thatch control are the first line of defense against weeds.

Herbicides, which kill existing weeds or prevent weeds from developing from seeds in the soil and turf, should be used after proper lawn maintenance practices have been established – not before. In this way, herbicides need to be used only occasionally to treat weed problems.

To control broadleaf weeds, such as dandelion, plaintain, or clover, selected post-emergent herbicides can be used. These kill certain plants, (in this case broadleaf weeds), without damaging the grass plants. Apply them when the weeds are young and actively growing, taking care to prevent any herbicide drift onto desirable broad-leaf plants, such as flowers, shrubs, vegetables or trees.

Pre-emergent herbicides generally provide the most effective control of annual grass weeds, such as crabgrass and foxtail. These herbicides kill weed seedlings just after the seed germinates, so the herbicide must be on the soil when the weed seeds germinate.

During a normal year, apply pre-emergent herbicides to control crabgrass by April 1st in warmer areas and May 1st in cooler areas. Our turf specialists can advise you on application times in your area. Do not wait until weeds have emerged to apply pre-emergent herbicides; the best method is to apply the herbicide to areas of the lawn which had a crabgrass or foxtail problem in the previous year.

Perennial grass weeds, such as quackgrass can be controlled chemically with non-selective post-emergent herbicides. These materials can kill or damage all plants that they contact, including desirable grass plants. Consiquently, they are only applied to weed hot spots. You have to re-seed spot treated areas when appropriate time has passed for the herbicide to become inactive.

With proper care, you will have the best lawn in the neighborhood

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