

HOW TO CARE FOR YOUR NEWLY SEEDED LAWN

COOL-SEASON (FESCUE AND BLUEGRASS) LAWNS



Do you want lush, green, uniform grass on your lawn? You can create the lawn of your dreams if you grow your grass from seed — you just need to know a few things about seeding, watering, mowing, and weed control.

Before you get to watering and mowing, you'll need to make sure that your lawn is properly prepared and seeded.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SEED



Choose a grass type that will thrive in your area. To do this, consult the USDA Hardiness Zone map and determine your zone. Then, you can choose a seed that grows well in that zone. For the midwest, your best choices are Kentucky Bluegrass and Tall Fescue.

The main thing to keep in mind when selecting your seed is to choose a seed that is free of any weed seeds. The label found on every bag will list “weed seeds” or “other crop seeds.” Both of these

categories should be listed at 0%. Avoid purchasing seed at big box stores that have one seed buyer for the entire country. Many times, these seed mixes are not the best for your area. Instead, purchase high-quality seed from local lawn and garden stores.

PREPARING THE GROUND

If you plan on installing an irrigation system, it's best to do it before you seed. You should also inspect the entire lawn for ruts and mounds. Level the ground as much as possible before you seed, and you'll have a much easier time mowing and watering later.

THE KEY IS SEED-TO-SOIL CONTACT

For maximum success, the seed must be worked into the soil, about $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ inch deep. For small areas, this means sprinkling your seed on the ground and using a garden rake to work the seed into the soil. For larger areas, you should apply the seed to the lawn and then work it into the soil with a verticutter/power-rake. This machine has a series of vertically spinning blades that cut grooves into the surface of the soil and push the seed below the surface. If the seed is applied to the surface only, the seed will dry out too quickly and not germinate well.



SPREADING THE SEED FOR YOUR BEAUTIFUL LAWN

If you have a variable-rate seed spreader, make sure that it's set for spreading grass seed. You can usually find this information printed on the spreader; otherwise, you can find it online from the manufacturer.

Put half of your lawn's seed in the spreader, and walk in straight lines in one direction across your yard.



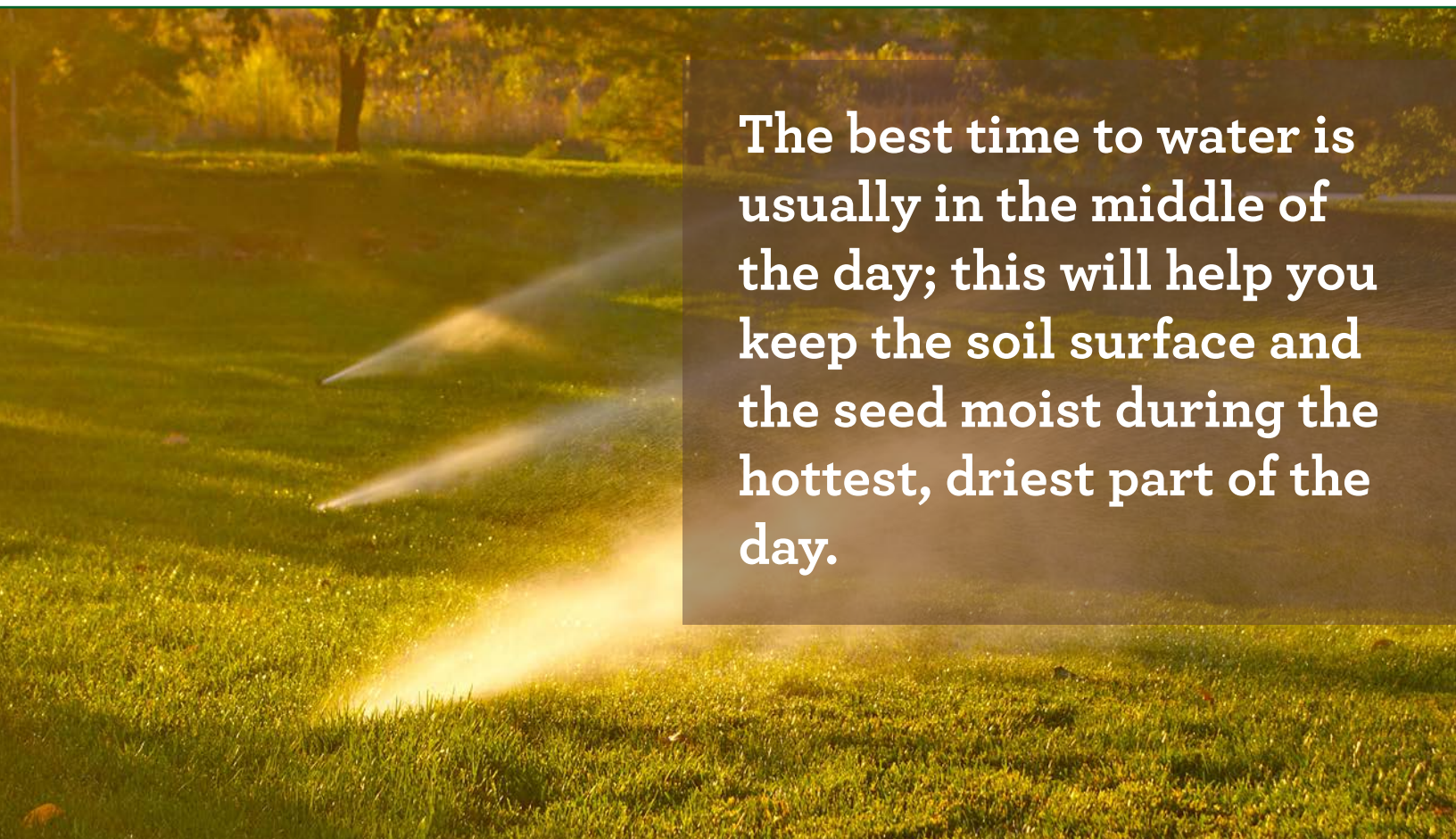
Put half of your lawn's seed in the spreader, and walk in straight lines in one direction across your yard. When you're finished with the first pass, put the rest of the seed in the spreader and spread it by walking in straight lines perpendicular to the lines you walked before. This ensures even spreading.

Once you've spread the seed, be sure to apply a starter fertilizer. Starter fertilizers have a higher phosphorous content, the middle number on a bag.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT WATERING

Newly seeded grass needs constant moisture to take root. Water triggers the seeds' germination process, which allows them to grow into healthy, established grass. If the ground you've seeded is too dry, the seeds will dry up and die, and you'll be left with bare ground instead of a lush lawn.

You can check your lawn's moisture level by physically feeling the ground with your hands — the lawn should be continually moist. In the early stages, you can also check it just by looking at the soil. The soil should stay a dark brown color. When it starts to lighten in color, it needs to be irrigated again. Usually, newly seeded grass requires irrigating every day while the seed is germinating and for the first few weeks of growth. After about 2-3 weeks of growth, you can usually shift to watering every other day, and then every 3 days later on.



The best time to water is usually in the middle of the day; this will help you keep the soil surface and the seed moist during the hottest, driest part of the day.

You'll want the top 2 inches of soil to be moist, but you don't want it to be soaked. Check your lawn's moisture level every morning and evening, and water it as necessary. The work you did leveling the ground will pay off here, as you won't have to worry about water collecting and pooling in low areas, causing seed rot.

Once the seedbed has started to establish itself and grass has begun to grow, continue to check the ground's moisture regularly. If you notice it getting dry, add some water. Remember, these new grass seedlings have very short roots and they will still require very frequent watering for most of the fall. Many people see the green seedlings and think that they can quit watering; however, you must keep the shallow root zone of those seedlings damp.

Once your lawn is well established and growing, you can cut back to giving it an inch of water once a week. If you're in a rainy season, you can water it less. Just make sure the soil stays moist, and your grass should continue to grow evenly and beautifully.

KNOW WHEN TO GET MOWING

Observe your grass in the weeks after you seed your lawn. If you've kept the ground suitably moist, you should begin to see green grass seedlings sprouting across your lawn within the first couple of weeks. At this point, you're probably wondering when you should start mowing. After all, you want your grass to fully grow in, but you don't want your lawn to look like a jungle.

Whether you are over-seeding to thicken up an existing lawn or you are seeding into bare ground, you will want to mow the lawn and the seedlings normally.



That is, when the existing grass gets to the height at which you would normally cut the lawn (around 3.5-4 inches), mow it back down to your desired height. You want to mow the lawn at the recommended height to stimulate the grass into spreading out across the lawn, not spending all of its energy growing up into the air. You will want to cut back on the water before you mow, so that you don't leave ruts in your newly seeded yard.

Take note — germination time varies. You can't just spread your seed, wait 4 weeks, and then mow the grass. Germination can take 2-3 weeks depending on your watering habits and grass type. If you live in a dry climate and are under-watering your seed, the process will take longer and will result in

thinner, patchier grass. Some climates and soil types require watering 2-3 times per day in the first weeks.

If you are unsure whether or not you've waited long enough, take a measurement. Once your grass has sprouted, filled in, and reached a height of about 3-4 inches, it's ready to be cut.

At this point, you should stop watering the lawn for a minimum of 48 hours before you cut the grass, and you should cut only about an inch off the top, taking the height down to 2-3 inches.



APPLYING WEED CONTROL

If you apply a weed control agent too soon, you will kill some of your grass seedlings and create more holes for weeds to take over. Wait to apply weed control until you've mowed your newly seeded lawn about two times. Refer to the label of your product for specific instructions.

After the appropriate amount of time has passed, you can spot treat any broadleaf weeds that have popped up in your lawn.



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To cut down on weeds further, your best bet is keeping your grass filled in. Pay close attention to your grass over the first few months of growth. Don't let it dry out, and make sure that you don't cut the grass too short, or you'll open up room for weeds to grow.


Apply a pre-emergent at least once in the spring to prevent crabgrass and other grassy weeds before they germinate. Dandelions and other broad-leafed plants can be treated after they pop up with labor saving products labeled to eradicate broadleaf weeds.

HOW LONG WILL GRASS TAKE TO GROW?

Typically, you can expect a full lawn in 6 to 9 weeks. However, cooler or drier weather will result in slower growth. This applies to fall and early spring. Seeding too late in the spring can be a gamble.

You will struggle to keep the soil moist enough for grass seeds to germinate, given evaporation and high temperatures of the early summer. High temperatures are tough on cool-season grasses, and may result in failed seeding, even if you manage to water appropriately. For this reason, we really recommend fall seeding.

In the warmer months, after your lawn has grown in, you can expect it to grow about 1-2 inches every week. Once autumn rolls around and the leaves start to fall, you'll see less growth, as your lawn essentially goes into hibernation.



Less growth during the fall and winter is to be expected and is not a sign that you've done something wrong or that your lawn is in poor health. Keep an eye on watering, and make sure that the turf is thick, and you'll have a healthy, beautiful lawn throughout the winter and into the spring and summer.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR YOUR LAWN'S FIRST GROWING SEASON

While we recommended earlier that you level the ground as much as possible, we realize that you can't always have a completely flat and level field. If your lawn is on a slope or your property is hilly, you may experience issues with runoff and seed migration if you leave your seed unprotected. If you have some small depressions, you can lightly topdress about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of topsoil over the grass without smothering it.

MULCH PROTECTION

To aid in your seed germination, you can use seed mulch products. In the past, many people used straw. Unfortunately, straw is frequently contaminated with weed seeds so is best avoided. Some of the best seed mulches are pellets of paper or alfalfa. The pellets are spread out, and expand when they are wet to cover and protect the seed. These seed mulch products will not only help keep your seed in place, but it will also help retain water and enhance germination.

RAKING LEAVES IS IMPORTANT, BUT...

If you seed your lawn in the late summer, you should expect to wait a little while before you start raking leaves. Wait until you have mowed your lawn for the first time. You should also use only a plastic rake, as this will catch the leaves and pine needles without damaging the turf and roots of your grass. A metal rake is too harsh for grass seedlings.

PREVENTING THATCH

You should mow your lawn at least every week and remove only about an inch of growth. This allows you to recycle the mulched grass blades back into the lawn. However, if you wait longer, you should collect the clippings in a bag or rake them up when you are finished mowing to prevent piles of grass from smothering the lawn.

CHANGE UP YOUR MOWING PATTERN

Mowing your lawn in the same pattern every week will “train” your grass to grow at an angle. You’ll also start to see lines in the grass where your mower wheels have been. Changing the direction and pattern you mow will encourage the grass blades to grow straight up.

KEEP YOUR BLADES SHARP

Dull mower blades don't cut so much as rip. If you want a healthy lawn, have your lawn mower's blades sharpened 1-4 times each mowing season, depending on how big your lawn is and the type of grass you have. This will ensure a clean cut every time and no ripping. It will also make your job easier as you mow.

BE CONSISTENT

In general, if you consistently water, mow, and rake your lawn, you'll have a healthy, full bed of grass that you can be proud of all year long. You can't make up for lost time by over-watering one week when you under-watered the week before. If you skip mowing for too long, you can't just cut it and forget it; you have to clean up those long blades. The more consistent you are with your lawn care, especially in the first growing season, the better it will look for years to come.





For more information on maintaining a beautiful, healthy lawn, contact Ryan Lawn & Tree at (855) 216-2293 or visit us at www.ryanlawn.com

