

ESTABLISHING A LAWN FROM SEED

The establishment of a home lawn is a task that should not be taken lightly. Following proper establishment procedures and planting high quality seed are the keys to successfully establishing a lawn.

Time of Seeding

The best time to seed a lawn in most of New York is between August 15 and September 15. In northern New York seed should be planted by September 15, while in southeast New York lawns can usually be seeded in late September with good results. Fall planting is preferred to spring and summer seeding because seeds germinate and grow rapidly in the warm soil. The warm days and cool nights are ideal for seedling growth and there is also less weed competition in fall than in early spring.

Establishment in spring and summer is possible when irrigation is available. However, lawns established in spring and summer may become infested with annual weeds unless preventative steps are taken. The additional precaution that should be taken with spring seeding is to use the herbicide siduron. Siduron is a member of a group of herbicides that have the capability of killing crabgrass and other grass weed seedlings as they germinate in the spring without damaging the established turf. Unfortunately, most of these pre-emergent herbicides kill the seeds of the cool season lawn grasses and cannot be used at the time of seeding. Siduron is the only exception. Siduron can be applied with bluegrass, fescues, and ryegrass at the time of seeding. The seedlings of crabgrass, foxtail, and barnyard grass will be selectively controlled and the desirable grasses will remain unaffected. Siduron is marketed under various trade names, including Tupersan and Starter Fertilizer with Crabgrass Preventer. Once the barrier of siduron has been established, the soil should not be further disturbed. Wherever the barrier is broken, annual weeds will emerge. Do not use crabgrass preventer unless it is labeled for new seedlings.

Fertilizer

Fertilization is very important at the time of seeding. This is the only time you will be able to incorporate required soil amendments or fertilizer into the root zone. Prior to preparing the seedbed, broadcast fertilizer according to soil test recommendations, then incorporate to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Soil testing information may be obtained from your county extension office. Where a soil test has not been made, apply 10 to 15 pounds of 0-46-0 (triple superphosphate) or 20 to 25 pounds of 0-20-0 (ordinary superphosphate) per 1,000 sq. ft., and work into the soil to a 4 to 6" depth. After the seedbed has been prepared and just before seeding, apply a commercial turfgrass starter fertilizer according to label directions. If a farm grade fertilizer is used, select one that is high in phosphorus, such as an 18-46-0. Apply the fertilizer at a rate to provide 1 to 1 ½ pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Additional fertilizer at a rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. should be applied to the lawn 3 to 4 weeks after germination, when the grass is 1 to 1 ½" tall.

Preparing the seedbed

Preparing the seedbed is the most labor intensive and time-consuming step in establishing your lawn, but it is also the most important. A well-prepared seedbed is essential for rapid, successful establishment of a lawn.

Using a rototiller or other cultivation equipment, work the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches, incorporating the fertilizer or other soil amendments recommended from soil test results. To prevent clodding, do not till a wet soil. Also, over tilling the soil will destroy soil structure and is undesirable. Rake the area to finish-grade just prior to seeding. Light rolling will indicate any low spots or irregularities in the seedbed.

Seeding

Select high quality seed of the grass species best adapted to the site. Perennial ryegrass may be included in seed mixtures for spring and summer plantings to help the lawn establish quickly. However, for fall planting, a mixture of 3 or 4 Kentucky bluegrass varieties is preferred. The following table lists several seed mixtures and the seeding rate for each.

Seed mixture	Ln/1000 ft.	Lb/acre
100% Kentucky bluegrass	1-1 ½	45-65
20% ryegrass + 80% bluegrass	2-2 ½	85-110
50% ryegrass + 50% bluegrass	3-3 ½	130-150
50% red fescue + 50% bluegrass	2 ½-3	110-130
100% red fescue	3-4	130-175
100% tall fescue	5-7	215-300

Divide the total seed quantity in half. Sow one-half in one direction and the other half at right angles to the first. After the starter fertilizer and seed have been broadcast, lightly rake the area to cover the seed to a depth of no greater than 1/4". Roll the area lightly to firm the soil around the seed. Grass seedlings are very susceptible to desiccation and the surface of a newly seeded lawn should not be allowed to dry. Water should only be applied in amounts necessary to keep the soil surface moist. Avoid over watering and runoff. Mulching the lawn with clean (weed free) straw will help conserve moisture and prevent erosion. One bale of straw per 1,000 sq. ft will give a light mulch covering that will not have to be removed after germination. Mulching with fresh grass is not recommended.

Mowing

Kentucky bluegrass should be maintained at a mowing height of 2 to 2-½". As a rule, no more than 1/3 of the grass blade should be removed. The new grass should be mowed when it reaches 3 to 3 ½" in height. Mowing at this time will promote the spreading and thickening of the grass. New lawn grasses should not be allowed to grow excessively long before the first mowing.

Broadleaf weed control

After you have completed the task of establishing your lawn, you will notice broadleaf weeds germinate along with the grass seedlings. Most broadleaf weeds can be easily controlled with a spectrum herbicide after the turf is established. It is safe to apply a herbicide after the lawn has been mowed at least two times.

Fact Sheet 7.36, last revision September 8, 1998.

This publication contains pesticide recommendations. Changes in pesticide regulations occur constantly and human errors are still possible. Some materials mentioned may no longer be legal. All pesticides distributed, sold or applied in New York State must be registered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Questions concerning the legality and/or registration status for pesticide use in New York State should be directed to the appropriate Cornell Cooperative Extension specialist or your regional DEC office.

READ THE LABEL BEFORE APPLYING ANY PESTICIDE.