

## GET YOUR NEW HOME'S LAWN OFF TO A GOOD START



Buying a new home? You're understandably proud of your investment, so you'll also want a lawn that makes a great first (and lasting) impression. Numerous studies indicate that landscaping improves the value of real estate from five to as much as 20 percent. An important part of the landscape and your investment is your lawn; make sure you give it a good start.

Select turfgrasses suited to your area and the lawn's use. Tell your local garden center expert or turfgrass sod producer how much shade your yard has, how you intend to use it (for example, for light use or as a heavy play area), and how much time you want to spend on maintenance. Not all grasses are up to every possible use and maintenance level.

Don't scrimp when it comes to choosing plant materials. The few dollars saved on grass seed or turfgrass sod that is even slightly inferior may cost hundreds of dollars and hours more to fix than if you made the correct choice before the project was even started.

Spend time and money to properly prepare the soil before planting. Sprinkling seed or laying sod on soil that has just been scuffed up with a rake is certain to result in failure. Instead, take the time to have a soil test performed, add the recommended soil amendments and deeply till the soil. Improving the soil before any planting takes place is the best time to enhance your lawn's ultimate beauty. Once the grass begins to grow, it's much more difficult to significantly improve the soil.

Select the season and your own availability to optimize success. In cool-season areas, fall is the preferred season to start a new lawn whether it is by seed or sod. But beyond that, there are no common "best times."

Sod can be installed whenever it is available from a farm (even if the ground is frozen), although it will require more water during peak summer heat. Seeding can be attempted in the spring, but remember that whatever you do to encourage grass seed to grow in the spring will also encourage weed growth.

Summer seeding is not practical in most areas because of the extra water that would be needed due to increased heat and added turfgrass disease pressure. For seeding, plan on watering two to three times a day for at least one month, and then less frequently for the next two to three months. Missing even a day's watering at this critical time can eliminate all the hard work that has gone into the project up to that point. Newly sprouted grass seed can die quickly. Sod will require frequent watering for at least one week and even longer during the summer.

Once the grass has established, water infrequently and deeply to encourage the deep roots that will have more water available in times of drought or heat. Watering as early in the morning as possible will reduce evaporation and wind losses and lessen the chances of disease outbreaks.

Never mow off more than the top third of the grass blade and keep your mower blade sharp. Clippings can be left on the lawn because they will degrade and return nutrients to the grass. Changing mowing patterns each time will avoid scalping and rutting.



*For more information on lawn care and helpful "How to" tips, visit The Lawn Institute at <http://www.TheLawnInstitute.org>.*