



J&L Garden Center

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620 North 500 West Bountiful, Utah 801-292-0421

www.JLGardenCenter.com

Rejuvenating Your Lawn - Over-Seeding

"Overseeding lawns" is just what it sounds like. Namely, you're sowing seed over existing grass, in order to fill in the bare patches. Therefore, overseeding lawns makes sense only if the existing grass is healthy enough and abundant enough to be worth keeping. Healthy, well maintained lawns are attractive landscape additions, while lawns in poor condition sometimes unsightly. The poor condition of a lawn may be due to poor water management, heat, drought, diseases, insects or many other factors. Lawns that contain over 50 percent desirable grasses can often be improved by overseeding. In severe cases, the existing lawn may have to be destroyed and a new one replanted on the site.



Why should you overseed?

This is the first question you should ask. "Why am I reseeding?" Are there bare spots that require new lawn care? Are there areas that are thin and weak due to shady conditions? Is there damage that needs lawn repair from past insect or disease activity? Are there areas that are thin due to repeated foot traffic or pet activity?



You need to assess the need for overseeding before you proceed. Spots, smaller than a salad plate, will generally fill-in by themselves, assuming the lawn receives the recommended amount of fertilizer it needs. Larger areas will need some assistance to fill in. Sod is one viable alternative to consider when faced with repairing large areas, but there is an alternative.

Overseeding is an overlooked activity in home lawn care. 'Yardeners' assume, incorrectly, that fertilizer is all that is needed to keep turf thick and free of weeds. So, you ask, "If I fertilize my lawn properly, why do I need to add new seed, especially if my grass looks pretty good right now?"

Grass gets tired. It needs to be revitalized every few years. After five or six years, grass plants will slow down their reproduction rates; they get tired, just like we do as we age. Thin grass invites weeds. Overseeding is not difficult and the benefits support investing the modest amount of time it takes to make it happen.

Overseeding compensates for that natural slow down of the turf's reproduction. There are two major benefits to overseeding every three or four years. First, you insure your lawn stays thick and dense, or if it has thinned, you will make it thick again. Thick grass has few, if any, weeds if it is mowed 2 to 3 inches tall.



The second benefit is disease resistance. The new varieties of seed you sow will have better disease resistance than those varieties already growing in your lawn.

Your goal is to have a lawn that is as dense as brand new quality sod. Go to a new yard with freshly laid sod and try to spread the grass blades to see if you can see any soil. Usually, the grass is so thick you cannot see soil in brand new sod. Now go outside and check your own turf to see if by spreading the grass blades you can see any soil. It is likely the soil will be readily visible. That means your lawn needs to be overseeded.



Grass will often die because of insect damage, disease damage, shade issues, over fertilization, over or under watering, misuse of "-cides", mowing, or the end of it's life cycle.

How does "natural" grass combat these issues? By creating and dropping seed. If grass is in a stressed situation, it will put all it's remaining energy into seed head production, hoping for cross-pollination. It then hopes that the seed matures, drops, and that the species continues on. That is what is most important to a dying grass plant.

So, if seed head production is what is the most important thing for a grass plant to do, what is the most important cultural practice we should do for our turf? Second to watering it, we should be reseeding it. When was the last time your turf was reseeded? When was the last time your turf was "beheaded" via mowing and the seed heads eliminated (before they had a chance to drop and germinate)?

When you overseed you should introduce a new species of grass that may be more drought tolerant, heat tolerant, insect and disease resistant, have improved dark green color, or in some instances, more aggressive. In many cases, the new turf will require less mowing or produces less grass clippings. Are these attributes that would make your lawn better?

What is overseeding?

Overseeding is the planting of grass seed directly into existing turf, without tearing up the roots or the soil. It's an easy way to fill in bare



spots, improve the density of turf, establish improved grass varieties and enhance your lawn's color.

If a lawn looks old, or just "worn out," if it needs increasing amounts of water and fertilizer to thrive, or it is disease or insect prone, it's the perfect time for overseeding.

Benefits of Overseeding

Many older lawns were planted with common type turf grasses not suited for the needs of today's homeowner. They are often more disease and insect prone, and often require more fertilizer and water.

Overseeding with newer turfgrass varieties, into an older lawn, can help it better withstand insects, disease, drought, shady conditions, and even heavy traffic. The investment in overseeding pays off by reducing the amount of fertilizer, water and pesticides required. Most importantly, a renovated lawn stays greener and looks thicker and healthier.

Before you overseed

You must analyze the problems that caused the original turf to deteriorate. It might be due to conditions that, if not corrected, will eventually cause the overseeded lawn to deteriorate again. **Correctable problems can include:**

- * Poor soil conditions
- * Improper drainage
- * Soil compaction
- * Insufficient water
- * Poor fertility
- * Poor air circulation
- * Insufficient sunlight
- * Excessive thatch
- * General neglect
- * Grass varieties not suitable for the area



When to overseed

Late summer or early fall is the best time to overseed lawns. Soil and atmospheric temperatures are most favorable for optimum seed germination and growth. With adequate moisture, fertilizer and sunlight, the new seedlings will be well established before the cooler fall weather sets in. Also, weed competition is less of a factor at this time, giving the grass seedlings a better environment to grow and develop.

Spring overseeding risks the chance of weather-related problems, heavy spring rains, unexpected high temperatures, and weed competition. Also, spring seeding may interfere with the application of pre-emergent crabgrass or broadleaf weed killers; concurrent application of seed and herbicides is generally not recommended because the herbicides may cause poor seedling establishment. It is best to delay herbicide treatment 4 to 6 weeks after new grass seed germinates. If you choose to overseed in the spring, be sure to take these factors into consideration.

Midsummer overseeding faces greater chances of disease, heat and drought stress, and weed competition.



Proper weed control and adequate irrigation are musts if overseeding is attempted in midsummer.

Dormant overseeding involves seeding in late fall or early winter, after the soil temperature is low enough to prevent seed germination. Success usually requires good snow cover during the winter, to prevent wind or water erosion, and to ensure germination doesn't begin too early. This method is sometimes preferred over spring seeding, because you don't have to wait for soil or moisture conditions to improve in the spring before overseeding.

How difficult can overseeding a lawn be?

You throw some fertilizer on it, throw some seed on it, water it a little, and instantly, a picture perfect lawn. Right? If your goal is to feed the birds, then follow that process. If your goal is to improve the overall appearance of your lawn, then there is still more to consider in terms of overseeding your lawn.



Basic Overseeding Guidelines

Step 1. Mow the lawn short, as short as your lawnmower will allow.

Step 2. Use a lawn thatch rake, or a power rake, to loosen the soil and to dethatch the lawn. One or two passes over the entire area should be sufficient. Remove excess thatch debris (1/2 inch or more) from the treated lawn. You should rake the overseeding area thoroughly, leaving just stubble and bare soil, with no debris. The reason for this step is that grass seed will not germinate if it is not in direct contact with the soil. If it is sitting on thatch, grass clippings, or on any other debris, it becomes bird food.

Step 3. In severe cases, aerate thoroughly, using a core-type aerator. They remove plugs of soil when run over the lawn. You may need to go over the area three or four times with the core aerator. When finished, there should be 20 to 40 holes per square foot. After you spread the grass seed over the lawn, drag the area with a piece of chain link fence or mat to break up the soil cores. Some of the reason you may need to aerate are:

- * Relieves soil compaction.
- * Speeds up thatch breakdown.
- * Improves water intake and percolation through the root zone.
- * Improves fertilizer intake.
- * Enhances air exchange between soil and atmosphere.
- * Ensures better seed-to-soil contact.
- * Improves turfgrass root development for stronger plants in the future.

Step 4. Fertilize with a good starter fertilizer, such as **Multi purpose 16-16-8 Fertilizer or 21-7-7 Lawn Food.**

Step 5. Spread the seed, using your preferred grass seed mixture.

Step 6. Rake the seed into the soil with a leaf rake.



Step 7. After overseeding, give the area a heavy watering right away, to wash the seed down into soil. Proper watering is critical to successful overseeding.

If you miss a day or two of watering, once the seed starts to germinate, and the seed dries out, you may lose up to 30 percent germination -- they don't tell you that on the seed box, but it happens.

Note: It is usually better to overseed new grass into the old, undisturbed roots, even if it is dead, rather than start with bare dirt. Overseeding is faster and easier than completely digging up the soil, and it leaves some cover to protect against wind or water erosion of the soil surface.

Overseeding Small Areas

Small areas can be prepared by gently raking the thin spots. When raking, it's necessary to break the soil surface without pulling out the existing turfgrass. After raking, sow the seed by hand. Then, work the seed into the soil by gently raking the areas a second time.

Post Seeding Care

Keep the seedbed moist with frequent, light applications of water. It's usually necessary to water at least two or three times a day. Continue to mow the lawn at a height of 1-1/2 to 2 inches. Mow the lawn frequently to reduce the competition from the established turfgrass. When the new seedlings reach a height of 1-1/2 to 2 inches, gradually increase the mowing height over the next several weeks. The final mowing height should be 2-1/2 to 3 inches. Approximately six weeks after germination, fertilize the lawn normally.



When properly overseeded, a thin, scruffy-looking lawn can be turned into a thick, lush lawn in just a few weeks.

Complete Renovation - Starting Over

When should you just start over? Proper overseeding can renovate a lawn if it has at least 50 percent or more of good, healthy turf. However, if your lawn has less than 50 percent healthy turf, it may be better to kill out the old turf, weeds, etc., and then reseed the entire lawn.

You may also just want to "rearrange the yard". Many homeowners think that it is a major undertaking. People believe that it requires major excavation, sod removal, importing of new soil, and much more. But, with the herbicides on the market, it can be very SIMPLE to change a lawn from a headache to a comforting, environmentally appealing, lower maintenance lawn area.

So, what does it take to change a lawn? It takes about a month of time, and some of the following equipment and materials.

1. A pump sprayer.
2. Killzall or Roundup herbicide (spreader sticker)
3. Rotary Lawnmower
4. Seed & Fertilizer spreader
5. Water roller



6. Sprinkler (either in-ground or hose end)
7. Starter fertilizer (16-16-8 or 21-7-7)
8. Grass Seed (high quality improved blends)
9. Peat Moss (optional)
10. Peat Moss Spreader (optional)

Much of the necessary equipment can be rented, if you don't want to purchase them.

Step 1. Spray the existing lawn with Killzall herbicide. Follow directions on label and apply so you do not miss any spots. Use a spreader sticker, to increase sticking ability of the herbicide. Don't water lawn for at least 24 hours, but water occasionally to keep the grass growing.

Step 2. After about a week the lawn will be dead. Spray any areas that are still actively growing. Repeat this process, at weekly intervals, until all the grass is dead. Bermuda grass may take 4 to 6 applications before it is completely under control.

Step 3. Once you are certain all the undesirable grass is dead, mow lawn down to ground level. This may require mowing and re-mowing lawn, reducing cutting height with each mowing. Collect the cuttings and discard them.



Step 4. Apply a light layer of sandy loamy soil to level lawn if needed. Also, if there are irrigation repairs or alterations to be made this is a great time to complete them.

Step 5. Lightly loosen the soil surface or thatch area with a rake, or by using a power rake.

Step 6. Reseed with the desired seed mix. Apply 1/2 of the seed in one direction and apply the other 1/2 of the seed at a 90 degree angle.

Step 7. Apply 16-16-8 or 21-7-7 fertilizer at rate of 5# per 1000 sq ft.

Step 8. (Optional) Apply peat moss or Black Forest Compost on top of the seed and fertilizer. This can be done by hand or with a peatmoss spreader.

Step 9. (Optional) Using a water roller, press seed, fertilizer and peat moss into soil to make good seed to soil contact.



Step 10. Apply water 2-3-4 times per day for approximately 2 weeks. Keep the area moist. If you miss a day or two, and the seed dries out, you may lose up to 30 percent germination -- they don't tell you that on the seed box.

Step 11. Mow lawn when it gets to approximately 3" tall.



Be Careful With Chemicals

Don't apply any pre-emergent herbicides prior to starting this project. Wait until next year before applying any types of pre-emergent herbicides.

Step 12. Don't worry about weeds. A lawnmower is the best herbicide for most weeds. Re-fertilize six weeks after germination. Don't spray broadleaf herbicides on new grass until it has been mowed at least 3 to 4 times (approximately 2 - 3 months old)

Now the turf has been changed from a headache to a thing of beauty.

What type of grass is best?

Many lawns are starting to be heavily infested with billbugs. At a recent turf field day held at USU, an entomologist discussed how a normal infestation is about 1 billbug/sq. ft. That number has risen now to approximately 6 billbugs/sq. ft. What is the solution to the problem? How about spraying more insecticides? **WRONG ANSWER!**



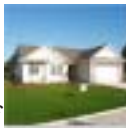
The right answer may be to over-seed with either tall fescue or perennial ryegrass. Why those two grasses? Because, they contain a fungus called endophyte. Endophytes are transferred from mother to offspring through the seed. Endophytes are not a pathogen on the fescues or ryegrasses. When a chewing or sucking insect comes along and tries to eat the leaf blade of these turfs the endophyte is ingested by the insect and the endophyte kills the insect. With the use of endophyte enhanced turf everyone is happy -the environmentalist, the turf owner, and the turf itself.

As bugs come out of hibernation, instead of reaching for the insecticide, try over-seeding the lawn with another 'insect resistant' type of grass. Nature has the answer for turf competing against bugs. It is found in endophytes.

Unfortunately, not all insects are affected by endophytes. Ryegrass and fescue have many other grubs and insects that feed on them and will still need timely applications of insecticides.

What type of grass should I choose?

Kentucky Bluegrass is the most common grass in this area. It is used in lawns, athletic fields, golf courses and parks. It is a cool season grass, which means it grows best in the spring and fall. Kentucky bluegrass suffers during the heat of summer, but it is very resilient. It will go dormant when water is scarce, and will recover quickly once the temperatures drop and consistent water becomes available.



With proper management, Kentucky bluegrass forms a fine-textured, high-quality, long-lasting turf. This species produces rhizomes (underground stems) that give rise to new bluegrass plants. This ability enables bluegrass to rapidly recuperate from injury and fill in thin areas in the lawn. Kentucky bluegrass is winter-hardy and capable of withstanding temperature and moisture extremes. During hot, dry periods it tends to become dormant and lose color. If high quality is desired during the summer period, consistent lawn irrigation is necessary. Kentucky bluegrass requires moist, well-drained soil to develop into high-quality turfgrass. Although Kentucky bluegrass performs best in full sun, some cultivars are adapted to shade.

Where bluegrass is allowed to go dormant during drought periods, as little as 1/2 inch of water every 2 to 3 weeks will keep the crowns of the grass alive. Then, after rainfall or significant irrigation the grass will quickly recover. The drought resistance of Kentucky bluegrass is generally underestimated. Bluegrass can survive several months without significant rainfall or irrigation.

Major diseases of bluegrass turf include Fusarium, Helminthosporium leaf spot diseases, Necrotic Ring Spot, Take-All Patch, rust, and powdery mildew. Always plant a mixture of several varieties of Kentucky bluegrass to help avoid these

diseases. Overseeding Kentucky bluegrass turf with perennial ryegrass or planting mixtures of bluegrass and ryegrass provides a good suppression of many turf diseases.

Perennial Ryegrass lawns are one of the best lower maintenance lawns of the cool season grasses. This is one of the toughest and most wearable turf covers that can be grown. Ryegrass is noted for quick germination, shiny green color, fine texture and dense forming sod. High disease and insect resistance helps to make perennial ryegrass one of the leading choices for lawn and athletic covers in north America. Ryegrass is preferred by homeowners because it produces a dark green turf which rapidly develops a strong root system, responds rapidly to fertilization, never needs pampering and is not subject to disease problems which plague some Kentucky bluegrasses. Ryegrass performs in a wide variety of soil types and will do well in clay or compacted areas which are not subject to heavy use.

Perennial ryegrass can also be mixed with other cool season grasses to provide more density to the dominate grass in the mixture. Perennial ryegrass is often added to Kentucky bluegrass to add strength and give bluegrass time to repair while the perennial is in full growth. These two grass species can be mowed at the same height and retain a sod density for which both are well known. Although bluegrass needs more fertilizer, the perennial ryegrass will respond to additional amounts without any damage.

Dwarf Tall fescue are grasses that can endure heavy traffic and have been developed for higher disease resistance, insect resistance, better blade structure, lower mowing capabilities, and better color.



Tall fescue has been used traditionally as a low-maintenance grass in areas where a coarser texture is not objectionable. Tall fescue tolerates soils of low fertility, persists well under low maintenance and possesses good tolerance to insects and diseases. When mature, tall fescue has excellent wear tolerance and, due to its deep-rooted nature, tolerates drought and will remain green throughout most summers.

Recently, a number of improved "turf-type" tall fescue cultivars have become available. These improved cultivars are less coarse, grow more upright, and exhibit a darker green color. All tall fescues grow rapidly in the spring and require more frequent mowing than Kentucky bluegrass. The popularity of the improved turf-type tall fescues is increasing and they are now being used on many lawn sites, playgrounds, parks and low-maintenance athletic fields where the use of coarser textured grasses is not objectionable.

Tall fescue lawns can easily be over seeded when the lawn is thin and starting to get a bunching, clumping, uneven appearance. Tall Fescue can be over seeded in the fall to get the lawn into shape before the next hot summer weather sets in.

Remember that good seed usually costs a little more. If your lawn is important to you, a couple of extra dollars for good seed will be well worth it.



IF YOU HAVE NOT OVERSEEDED YOUR LAWN IN THE LAST 4 YEARS, IT NEEDS TO BE DONE TO MAKE YOUR LAWN AS DENSE AS BRAND NEW SOD!

