

LC 654

## RENOVATING A HOME LAWN

Is it time for a lawn over-haul? Have you moved to a new home where the lawn is less than perfect, and a little maintenance plus a little love is not going to get the job done? There are some questions that you must ask yourself before you commit yourself to the job. Look to determine the health of your lawn and inventory its strengths and weaknesses. Does the existing lawn have water run off? Check for thatch greater than ½-inch. Aeration of your lawn may be the answer. Is the lawn in a shaded area? You may need to change the type of grass or go to a ground cover. Is there an insect infestation? Is there moss in the lawn?



If you are satisfied with the existing lawn, except for its appearance, proper maintenance may be an issue. Have you been watering sufficiently or providing proper fertilization for the existing lawn? Only water your lawn when it needs it. In the summer, water 1-2 times per week, applying about 1 to 1½-inches of water weekly. Over watering can cause insect infestation i.e., European Crane Fly.

Moss in the lawn is a sign of soil compaction. If your thatch layer is in excess of ½-inch you should consider de-thatching your lawn. This process should be done about every two years in March or April.

To reduce soil compaction of your lawn, aeration of your lawn is necessary. This maintenance function may be accomplished by the use of power equipment, which is easily rented. The mechanical equipment will produce a 4-5 inch plug. These plugs can be left to decompose or removed to your compost pile. Water can then easily enter the root zone and the root structure can “breathe,” returning your lawn to full vigor. Should you have high traffic areas, this process should be done on an annual basis or even more frequently. If compaction is not a problem, this step can be skipped.

Have you had the soil tested? Most turf varieties tolerate western Oregon soils. These species do well in a 5.0 to 6.0 pH range but prefer a pH of 6.3-6.9. Your pH can be tested inexpensively by purchasing a tester at a local garden shop and testing it yourself. If your tests are low, or you are considering applying Kentucky bluegrass, than adding some agriculture lime may be advisable. As a general rule, adding lime is needed every 3-5 years to maintain a proper pH balance.

Lawn fertilization can be a powerful tool for improving lawn appearance. A lawn that is vigorous will resist insect infestation and tolerate environmental stress. For existing lawns, a slow release fertilizer may be suitable as it avoids burning existing turf. Soils in western Oregon tend to be low in potassium. Look for a complete fertilizer containing nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium such as triple 16 (16-16-16) which works well and tends to be less expensive. Fertilizers with a higher nitrogen level are

preferred, such as one rated 24-4-12. Re-apply in 4 to 6 weeks. Use an inexpensive “hand held” or “whirly bird” type spreader as they are the most effective.

If your lawn has less than 50% weeds and less than ½” thatch layer, you might consider a partial renovation. This approach utilizes the use of a 2-4 D herbicide spray to kill the unwanted broadleaf plants, i.e. dandelions. However, you should identify the weeds prior to purchasing a herbicide. Some applications must be done up to six weeks prior to re-seeding. Mechanical removal is an option. If soil compaction is a problem, aeration should be done prior to the renovation process. This is because soil that is compacted contributes to poor seed germination.

Propane burning can be used if the existing lawn is annual blue grass or annual ryegrass. Burning is accomplished by the use of a wand or torch. You don’t need to heavily burn the area. Lightly pass the flame over the weeds. Heat the plants but do not carbonize them. Within 24-hours the weed should have collapsed. Apply 1-3” of organic materials and then fertilize. You are now ready to apply your seed. Even though some of the grass may become scorched, if it is annual rye or annual bluegrass the grass will renew in a couple of weeks.

Total lawn replacement may be necessary when you want to change turf type or if the undesirable turf covers more than 50% of the total area. The existing sod can be removed mechanically by hand, with chemicals, or with power equipment. The objective is to remove the existing sod layer and begin again with a new lawn. With the mechanical method the sod layer is simply scraped by hand and then replaced with a new layer, or the sod layer is mowed and the remainder is rototilled. Sod planers are available to rent for mechanically scraping old sod prior to replanting. Another effective method is to use Round Up. More than one application may be necessary depending on the type of grass you currently have. Be sure to read the label and follow the directions explicitly. Treat the top layer, wait about four weeks, then replant with an appropriate grass seed or sod. When replanting renovated lawns, a mixture of perennial ryegrass and bentgrass works best on sites where the previous grass was killed with herbicides.

Another publication is available from the OSU/Lane County Extension Service for \$2.50 titled “Practical Lawn Establishment and Renovation” (EC 1550).

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