

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



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The Ultimate Do It Yourself Lawn Renovation

There is an awesome amount of work that goes along with making a poor site into a good site, particularly in terms of the vast size of even a small lawn. Those of us that have had good success amending a flower bed or enjoying the productivity of a raised vegetable garden will look at such a lawn and say sure, I can do this in a weekend. No sweat.

WRONG!

Lots and lots of sweat, back breaking labor and earth moving tools. A complete renovation, **done right**, is a week's worth of work, and then about six weeks of intensive care afterwards.

CAN IT BE DONE?

You bet. And the rewards of stress free lawn maintenance for many years after are ultimately worth it. However, like the triple bypass, make sure it's done right the first time. Cutting corners will invite weeds and other lawn health disasters. Time your renovation correctly: early September is ideal, and as I said, don't plan to go away for about two months afterwards. Make sure that you have reserved your power equipment ahead of time at your rental agency since many other people will have the same idea that you do. Make sure that you have soil amendments like compost on hand, or delivered ahead of time, so that you can get a pH of the material. You should also get a pH of the existing topsoil so that you know how much lime to amend with, if any. A final pH of 6.3-6.8 is crucial for the soil structure and for nutrient uptake by grass.

Do you want an in-ground irrigation system? Now is the ideal time to have one installed. We do not recommend that you do this yourself. Despite the kits that you can buy from local suppliers, irrigation technology is very fine tuned and requires extensive training to produce efficient, well constructed systems. Make sure your contractor is certified by the national irrigation association—this means that they have had this training.

OKAY, YOU'RE READY TO START!

The fastest way to do this for those of you on a limited time budget is to rent a sod cutter and strip it off. Do you lose some top soil this way? Certainly, but if you are sitting on a poor site anyway, replacing the little you lose this way with an organic amendment is a better bet. Set the sod cutter on the lowest setting so you get as much of the old root system as possible. Spread your organic amendment on the surface, using a 2-3 inch depth of material, or 6 cubic feet per 1000 square feet of lawn area. Spread starter fertilizer on the soil, using 20 lbs of 5-10-5 or 5-10-10 NPK, or its equivalent, per 1000 square feet (see chart 1). Spread lime based on the recommendation of your soil pH test

STEP TWO, FIRE UP THE ROTOTILLER!

Plow your organic and other amendments in to a depth of 6-8 inches. Do not over rototill or else you break down the soil structure, leading to compaction and drainage problems. You want soil clumps from the size of a pea to the size of a golf ball. If you have a slope, don't plant it to grass, but install a low maintenance ground cover. Holes and dips in the landscape should not be filled in with pure organic matter or topsoil brought in. Instead mix equal parts organic matter and topsoil shaken from turf that was removed from your site and use this mix to fill in depressions. The site should slope only slightly away from the house to promote drainage. Try to avoid piling extra soil on the tops of tree or shrub roots, or scraping excess earth away from these plants since both things can damage or stress the plants.

C-1-14 revised RT 1/09

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Now you are ready to rake the seed bed. Rake out clumps of roots, stones and debris that are over 2" in diameter, then rake again to smooth the bed. Apply a light fertilization of about a third the amount that was put down prior to the incorporation of other amendments.

Allow the bed to settle for 24 hours. Rake a final time for levelness and then seed with a mix of grasses that are appropriate for your site and at rates appropriate for the type of grass you have selected. Make sure to compensate for nonviable seed by calculating the pure live seed rate. Divide seed mixture in half and sow each half in opposite directions so that there is good overlap. Mixing every 10 pounds of Kentucky bluegrass seed with one gallon of water and stirring it several times over the next 24 hours cuts germination time by one third to one half. Kentucky bluegrass

may not be ideal for your site however. If you have a hot dry site with lots of sun and traffic, tall fescue is a good choice. If you have dry shade with little traffic, fine fescue is a better choice.

Mulch using a bale and a half of **straw**/1000 square feet. You will not need to remove this unless you have applied it too thickly. (Don't use hay since hay contains lots of weed seeds).

Now here is one time where we recommend light, frequent waterings, and make sure the waterings are gentle since seed is easily washed away. Initially water to a depth of 5-6 inches and then water lightly several times a day. **You will not be able to back off this regimen until the grass is at least 1.5" long!** When grass reaches a height of 4 inches, mow it back to three and begin to treat grass like a normal lawn.