



Gardeners Helping Gardeners Succeed

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Step-by-Step: Mending Lawns

Nicks and bruises on lawns planted with cool-season grasses are best mended in fall. Repairing small patches of turf is usually a simple task if the rest of the lawn grows well and gets good drainage, regular fertilizing and enough light. Likewise, sparse turf under deciduous trees can sometimes be restored by merely reseeding with a shade mixture. Reseeding isn't even necessary in many cases. The yellow areas of grass killed because it spent too many hot afternoons under-watered may grow back. Healthy bluegrass spreads by underground stems, and these should quickly fill in broken spots, under good conditions.

Take the time at the outset to identify the cause of problems. Make sure you know what disease and insect pests are damaging your lawn before treating it with pesticides. A soil test can be an invaluable aid; it will tell you if your soil is alkaline or not; whether you should feed it nitrogen, potassium, phosphate, sulfur or iron, or all five.

The seed you plant should suit the needs of your lawn: a lawn that is only looked at doesn't require the same kind of strength as a football field. Study the labels on the seed packages. Mixtures are useful because they combine the beneficial traits of different grasses.

1. There are always places in a lawn that become compacted for one reason or another. You can rent machines that will aerate lawns, but for small sections it is just as effective to perforate the soil with a hand sod aerator. (Water the day before to soften the turf.) Rake in some good soil, level, and reseed.
2. A little bit of thatch is a good thing and acts as a mulch, but a lawn that is spongy is not. A thick mat of brown, dead grass (thatch) blocks water, air, light and fertilizer on their way to grass roots. Aerating thatch will help speed decomposition of dead grass. You can use a thatching rake, with a push-me-pull-you motion to cut through the mat of dead growth. If you turn up a lot of old thatch, rake it out of the lawn. Fertilize with a slow-release organic fertilizer 8-2-4 (or similar formula). If the lawn has thinned out, use a starter fertilizer and reseed. The seed should catch hold on the renovated and scarred surface.
 - 3 a. Broadcast seed over bare spots and thinning areas, crisscrossing it to assure thorough coverage. The rate of sowing depends on the kind of grass you're planting. Rake it in lightly so that the seed is thinly covered. Tamp gently with the back of a garden rake or roll the new seed bed. Mulch with a thin layer of *Boost*, compost or manure. Most grasses should germinate within two weeks, depending on the temperatures of soil and air (and the quality of the seed mix).
 - 3 b. On slopes, sod establishes itself more quickly than seed and so diminishes erosion. Unroll the turf across the slope and stagger the courses to avoid long unbroken seams. Don't step on the turf if you can help it; if you must, put down a board or pallet to stand on. Snug the pieces of turf up against one another and tamp them gently in place. Edges should be trimmed off neatly.
4. Water seed and newly laid turf. A fine spray several times a day is best until new grass can hold its' own against jets from a sprinkler. All plantings should be kept evenly watered until thoroughly established, even when this means several waterings a day. After grass has sprouted continue frequent waterings, for young grass seedlings are especially vulnerable to drought.
5. Grass should be 3-4 inches high and the turf knit together before the first mowing. Make sure the mower blade is clean and sharp; a gummy or dull edge can yank out new seedlings.