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Tips on Starting a Lawn

These basic steps should help you establish a lawn that is attractive and easy to maintain.

Rough Grading: Remove all building debris and large rocks. Rough grade the area to the desired drainage and landscape features. Remember that fill areas often need to settle to avoid later unevenness. Make sure areas you intend for lawn use have a slope of at least one percent but not more than ten percent. Avoid steep slopes, since it is difficult to establish and mow grass on these areas. Watch for low areas which may need special drainage. Compacted soils from heavy truck traffic may need deep tilling to break up the soil.

Topsoil: The organic matter and granular structure plus accumulated nutrients of topsoil provide a better structure to establish a new lawn. If possible when you are beginning construction, push aside and save the topsoil, then re-spread it over the base area. Topsoil “hailed in” is expensive. In either case, the topsoil should be spread to a depth of four inches or more.

Peat: Organic matter holds moisture and nutrients, but relatively large amounts are required to produce an effective change. Manure, compost, leaf mold, or rotted sawdust may be spread one to two inches deep. Sand can be used to help break up hard soils. Any of these amendments should be thoroughly mixed with the soil.

Lime: A pH of 6.0 to 6.5 is ideal. Most soils in Indiana fall within this range. If you are concerned, check with the county extension agent for information on how to have a soil test done.

Nutrition: It is much easier getting a lawn established the first time than to keep working at it over several seasons. Ample nutrition is critical to rapid turf grow. A balanced fertilizer of 12-12-12 spread at 10 lbs. per 1000 square feet will provide ample nutrition to establish the lawn.

Soil Preparation: Loosen the soil as deeply as practical with a tractor cultivator, rototiller, etc. Incorporate additives such as lime, fertilizer, and peat at this time. Edges of the lawn should be one inch below sidewalks and driveways. A drag made from a ladder or large plank pulled with a rope can aid in smoothing slight depressions.

Seeding: When seeding, go over the area twice, using a criss-cross action to spread half the seed in one direction and half the seed in the other direction. Cover the seed by raking or by using a drag. Two pounds of bluegrass or three to four pounds of a grass seed mixture per 1000 square feet should be ample. Mulching will help minimize erosion and surface dryness. Straw, peat, mulch, and excelsior netting will help get your lawn off to a better start. Lawns may be planted any time, but fall planting is best .

Seed Varieties: Always buy good quality, weed-free grass seed. Bluegrasses, turf-type perennial ryegrasses, and fescues are favorites in the Midwest. These come in blends designed for specific purposes.