

## Preparing for Fall Lawn Seeding

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

For the first time in several years I feel that we are going to have decent conditions to get turf grass established this fall. Early September is the preferred time to plant our cool season turf grass species like tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. By planting in early September, the soils are still warm so the seed can germinate quickly and start growing. The weather is typically starting to cool down in September which is also a good thing for the young grass plants. We'd like to have six to eight weeks of good growing conditions to get the grass plants well established before winter and an early September planting date allows this.

Whether you are starting a brand new lawn, or over seeding to thicken up a drought ravaged lawn there are several things you can do to improve your success. If you haven't soil tested your lawn area in several years it would be a good idea to do that first. Just bring a one pint sample of soil collected from several spots in your yard into our office and we'll take it from there. If you've been fertilizing regularly you may not need to add starter fertilizer, but we have many new lawns in our area where soil phosphorus levels are very low and this will lead to a failure of getting the lawn established. I am not a big fan of the home soil test kits, just bring the soil in to the Extension Office, 119 East 9<sup>th</sup> St, and we can have a proper laboratory analysis done.

Another key step in getting grass seed established is proper seed to soil contact. You really can not just sow seed on the soil surface and get it established. It just isn't going to happen. You need to get the seed about one fourth inch below the soil surface. The two most common ways to do this is to totally work up the soil, sow it and then harrow or press it in, or use a power seeder that uses spinning blades to cut slots in the soil and then drops the seed right behind it into those slots. Power seeders can be rented most anywhere that has lawn equipment for rent. I have used them many times with excellent results and the equipment isn't too unwieldy.

If you are going to be planting seed in the coming weeks, avoid using any weed killers between now and then, other than glyphosate. Glyphosate (Round-up) kills everything but is deactivated by the soil in 24 hours. Avoid broadleaf herbicides (dandelion killers) as these will leave residue in the soils for several weeks that can damage young grass seedlings. After the grass starts to grow, don't use any weed killers until after it has been mowed three times. Speaking of mowing, you need to be mowing these cool season grasses at least three to three and a half inches tall. Even for the young grass, don't mow it too short. The grass needs a long leaf blade to produce energy (food) and to shade the ground to reduce weed competition.

Choice of grass seed is very critical. Read the fine print on the label. You want to see Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue varieties only. You want to see variety names NOT just tall fescue or bluegrass. You want to avoid things like ryegrass (annual or perennial), creeping red fescue or any kind of fescue except tall fescue. Those other grasses will come up quickly and look just fine this fall, but when we have that first round of hot and dry weather next summer, they will be in trouble.

For those wanting more information on fall lawn care I will be holding a fall lawn care clinic Monday evening, August 26<sup>th</sup> starting at 7:00 p.m. at the 4-H/Sr. Citizen's Building on the Geary County fairgrounds, 1025 South Spring Valley Road. There is no preregistration required, there is no charge and it is open to the public!