

Prepare Now For Lawn Reseeding in September

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you want to start a new lawn or overseed an existing lawn to make it thicker, early September is the best time of year to do that. The preparation for that seeding event needs to start now, though, so the ground is ready when the weather cooperates.

I always like to start with a soil test. Fescue and bluegrass, the two cool season grass species recommended for lawns in our area, are tolerant of a wide range of soil pH levels. But both will need good levels of soil phosphorus for good stand establishment. Lawns in the older parts of town probably have good levels of phosphorus, but we often find very low phosphorus levels in the newer sections of town, especially those areas that were recently native prairie. We need to know for sure how much, if any, starter fertilizer to apply. Take a composite sample from locations in your yard so you have one pint of soil and bring it to our office at 119 East 9th Street in Junction City. Cost is about \$15.

Whatever the reason you have for reseeding, remember that you need to get the seed into the soil. Simply scattering it on the surface and watering won't work. For small areas you can rake up the soil, sow the seed and rake it in. For larger areas a power seeder works well. These are available anywhere that lawn equipment can be rented. If you are planning to overseed to thicken up a lawn that is thin or patchy just keep mowing up until planting time. The day you want to plant, mow a little shorter and then seed right through the thin stands with the power seeder. Fertilizer can be broadcast over the top prior to seeding. Some power seeders also have a fertilizer box where you can put the fertilizer.

You need to be really careful with herbicide use before planting. Avoid using any of the broadleaf herbicides (dandelion killers) three to four weeks pre-seeding. These herbicides can cause damage to seedling grasses. If you have a lot of weeds and want to start with a clean slate then you can use glyphosate (Roundup) a week or two before seeding. Glyphosate has no soil residual activity. Certainly do not use any crabgrass preventer products. New fescue and bluegrass will be controlled by these products just like crabgrass will and your new seeding attempt will fail. If you are trying to kill out Bermuda grass to reseed, there are special steps you need to take. Call me for details, 238-4161.

Once the seed is in the ground and starts to germinate, it is very important to keep it moist. Once seed starts to germinate it can not be allowed to dry out or it will die. A new seeding is one time when you may need to water a little bit every day or maybe even twice a day. Once the small plants start to get a little size you can start reducing the watering to every other day and then every third day, if it hasn't rained.

The first couple of weeks of September are best but for good results get the seed planted by October 10th. Use a good seed source. Avoid blends that have a lot of rye grass, hard fescue or red fescue. These species do not do well in our hot and dry weather. Use only improved tall fescue blends or Kentucky bluegrass blends. Don't apply too much seed. Excessive seeding rates will look good as the plants emerge but then they start to die out because of the crowding. For new fescue lawns apply six to eight pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet. For bluegrass apply two to three pounds per 1,000 square feet. If over seeding or thickening a thin lawn, apply one half these rates. Once the grass has reached two to three inches in height, mow at regular mowing heights. Do not mow it low. The mowing action will encourage the grass to tiller and thicken. Then apply a high nitrogen fertilizer in late October.