

## **Start Preparing for Lawn Renovation Now**

### **AGRI-VIEWS**

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

The past 12 months have been brutal on all plants and especially on lawns. I don't know if this fall will be any better than last fall for starting a new lawn, but historically September is the best time to plant fescue or bluegrass. It doesn't matter if you are starting from scratch or just doing some overseeding to try to thicken up your lawn, planting in September allows your lawn to start quickly and get well established before cold weather shuts things down for winter. Then we have next spring for the plants to really get well established before another potentially brutal Kansas summer comes along.

To better improve your chances of success with a lawn seeding you need to take the month of August to get you and yard prepared. The first step is to decide if you need to kill off existing cover on your lawn. If you have Bermudagrass then absolutely you need to control it. Make sure the Bermudagrass is growing well, spray it with glyphosate (Roundup, Kleenup and others), water it after one week and spray it again two weeks after the first treatment. If you have a few scattered grass plants, weeds, etc., then you can probably just use a power seeder and plant right through the existing vegetation.

The other question you need to ask up front is if you are simply overseeding a thin lawn or doing a complete reseeding. If you have less than about 50% turf coverage you probably need to do a full reseed. If you just have some thin spots or the entire lawn is thin then an overseed will be helpful. The difference comes down partly to seeding rate and partly what equipment you have. With power seeders, available for rent from most hardware stores, you can seed right through existing vegetation. You can use these for a new seeding or you can till everything up, scatter seed by hand and then rake it in. What you can not do is just toss seed about and water it in. That just doesn't work well.

Next, unless you've had a soil test of your lawn in the past two years, collect a soil sample from the top three inches of soil in several locations randomly around your yard. We need about one pint of soil (a butter tub works good). We'll send the soil to the KSU soils lab, I'll get the results back and write my recommendations. We are most concerned with soil pH (acidity or alkalinity) and phosphorus levels. Too low a level of either will yield unsatisfactory seeding results. If the soil pH needs to be adjusted, the lime or sulfur needs to be applied and tilled in prior to planting.

If you decide to plant tall fescue (my general recommendation), then a new seeding will require 6 to 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet or 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet if overseeding. If you choose Kentucky bluegrass then use 2 to 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Purchase a quality blend that ONLY contains tall fescue or bluegrass. Also read the seed tag carefully and make sure it has 0% other crop seed.

Seed as early in September as you possibly can. Because we don't know if we'll have adequate rainfall you need to be prepared to water the grass up to get it established. If you don't want to water, don't start the process! Until the new grass emerges you will need to water daily if not twice daily to keep that surface inch damp. Once the little grass sprigs start to emerge, start watering less frequently (every other day, then every three days, etc.) but water longer to moisten the soil more deeply. Don't start to mow until it is 3 to 3.5 inches tall and then be sure to mow it that tall, don't scalp it!