

MAINTENANCE

Don't double up on sod

Turfgrass sod experts agree: Installing sod on an existing lawn will create more work in the end.

By JIM NOVAK

The Internet can be a tremendous tool, especially when it comes to seeking helpful information. Unfortunately, misinformation is abundant.

Consider this "advice" one website's contributing writer offered.

"Professional landscapers often apply sod directly over grass. The sod compresses the grass and limits its exposure to sunlight and water. This quickly kills the already existing grass, in much the same way that a brick left on a lawn kills the grass beneath it. When the grass dies,

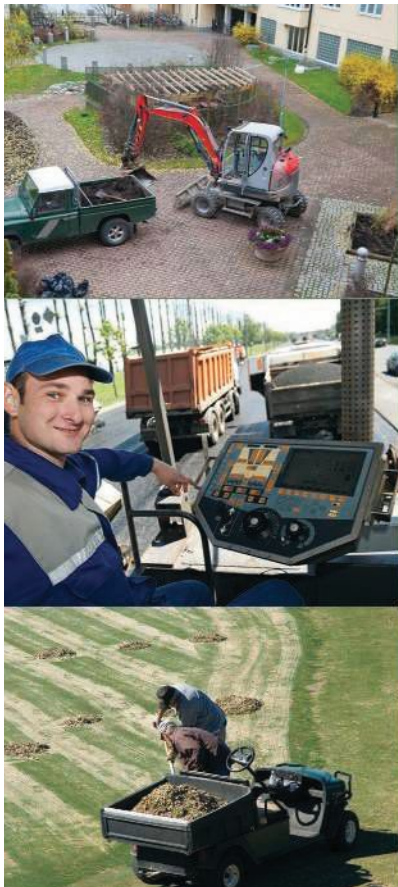
it gives off nutrients that actually benefit the new sod above it. The main nutrient that the dead grass layer provides is nitrogen. Applying sod directly over grass is advantageous because it requires less work. The lawn does not need to be treated with herbicide. Also, you do not need to till your yard."

Landscape contractors, take note: Turfgrass producers agree laying sod over an existing lawn isn't acceptable.

"Not a good idea," says Bob Weerts of Blue Valley Sod Farm in Winnebago, *continued on page 30*



PHOTOS: JIM NOVAK



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Minn., who recently dealt firsthand with a landscape consultant who had just completed an inspection for one of his customers, a national restaurant chain. The problem? A dying new lawn. The reason? The contractor laid new turfgrass sod over the existing turf weeks earlier. The new grass never rooted.

“This is not a practice that I have ever heard of working,” says Mike Blair of Green Velvet Sod Farms in Bellbrook, Ohio. In addition to the new sod’s roots drying out and dying, the decomposing turf could develop an acid or slim, causing further problems, he says.

Warren Bell of Biogress Sod Farm in Sandy, Utah, concurs it’s not wise. “The surface of the old lawn has a lot of organic matter and likely will not match the soil profile of the sod being installed,” he says. “Water will never move through the profile efficiently.”

So, if a client or employee suggests you lay new sod directly on top of an existing lawn, don’t do it.

Novak is public relations manager for Turfgrass Producers International.

SOD-LAYING TIPS

Here are a few pointers from Linda Bradley of Turf Mountain Sod in Hendersonville, N.C.

- ▶ **All sod must make soil to root contact.** Existing turf must be extremely sparse or topped with soil before laying the new sod. Roots won’t penetrate hard ground; till or loosen the top 2 in. to 3 in. of soil.
- ▶ **Grade is important.** There cannot be any water-holding spots, and water never should flow toward the building or home.
- ▶ **Weeds can grow through the new sod,** so it’s important to eradicate them before installation.



Jimmy Torres, Green Lawn’s service manager, reviews all customer information, including lawn flags that technicians leave at a customer’s home.

Training day

Quarterly educational “rodeos” keep the team at Green Lawn Fertilizing on the same page.

By MARISA PALMIERI

You can’t grow if you’re not investing in your employees, says Matt Jesson, president and owner of Green Lawn Fertilizing in West Chester, Pa. When you learn he’s focused on growing his firm 15 percent to 20 percent a year, you understand why he holds a quarterly cross-training program for all of the company’s 65 employees.

“It gives everyone a better understanding of how their jobs affect the growth of the company and how they’re a part of a great company,” Jesson says. This year is the first full year he’s held the training sessions, dubbed “rodeos,” on a quarterly basis. They used to be conducted twice a year. The reason for the increase is to keep up with the natural changes that happen in the business every 60 to 90 days.

ON THE SAME PAGE

On a typical rodeo day, the company operates from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. After that, Green Lawn provides lunch, followed by three hours of education. Jesson kicks off with a presentation about the status of the business and key objectives, and he addresses questions and concerns. Next, employees rotate through stations, learning about various parts of the business, such as customer

service, operations, sales and the firm’s new pest control division. The executive team and department managers speak at each station. The idea is to give employees a taste of the processes and procedures of each area and what challenges it’s facing. For example, the sales station might cover what the sales team is currently selling and why; customer service could address what type of service calls it’s been receiving.

TEAM BUILDING

The training program also builds relationships among coworkers.

“This is a good chance for our office reps to spend more time with the sales team and the technicians,” Jesson says.

At the fall rodeo, to keep employees engaged, each department leader had 10 gift cards to hand out to employees who stood out during training.

Cross-training employees doesn’t have to be costly or complicated, Jesson says, noting he hosts the sessions in the firm’s on-site training room to keep costs down. Still, it is an investment. Paid three-hour training for 65 employees equates to nearly 200 hours.

Regardless, it will remain a priority for fast-growing Green Lawn Fertilizing. As Jesson says, “Training is the most important thing.” **LMI**