

# Mulches Improve New Turf Stands

By  
W. R. THOMPSON, JR.  
Agronomist, American Potash Institute  
and  
HIRAM D. PALMERTREE  
Agronomist, Mississippi Cooperative  
Extension Service

**S**TANDS of nearly all plantings of fine turf can be improved through the use of mulches. Mulching of newly planted areas will reduce erosion, conserve moisture and temper sharp temperature changes.

Grasses established from seed, such as common bermudagrass, tall fescue, bluegrass, creeping red fescue, and bahiagrass, are easily adapted to mulching techniques.

Turfgrasses such as improved turf—bermudagrasses, zoysias, St. Augustine, and centipede—which must be planted vegetatively using sprigs or stolons, are now being successfully established by stolonizing (broadcasting chopped stolons or sprigs) and then mulching with various mulches. Through the use of specialized machines, sprigs and manufactured mulches can be applied in a one-step operation.

Regardless of the grass planted or method used, prepare a good, firm seedbed. A good seedbed is essential for a successful lawn and eliminates several problems which might develop in lawns. Always plant an adapted variety of turfgrass and use enough seed or plant material to obtain complete and uniform coverage.

When small grain straw is used as a mulch, the lawn should be planted, rolled, and then mulched with straw at a rate equal to 2 to 3 tons of straw per acre.

The availability of small grain straw is dependent upon the season, and straw is objectionable in home lawns because of



**Conwed Hydro Mulch** is being applied in this instance to a typical slope by hydraulic method. Seed, mulch and fertilizer are mixed, then applied on soil at distances up to 100 ft.

the weed and small grain seeds which come in with the baled straw.

Several manufactured mulches are available for mulching newly planted lawns. Manufactured mulches are packaged mulches and are commercially available any season of the year.

If a manufactured mulch is used, two procedures are possible. First, the same procedure as with straw mulch can be followed, or second, the hydroplanting technique can be employed. With this technique the seedbed is prepared and the seeds or sprigs and manufactured mulch is applied in a single operation with special hydroplanting equipment.

One of the most popular mulches for home lawn areas is the wood-cellulose fiber mulch. This material consists of ground wood fibers, which are dyed a green color for ease of application and aesthetic value during the establishment period. These

materials are usually applied on home lawns or fine turf areas at a rate of 2,000 pounds per acre. Wood fiber mulches are applied in a water slurry or by hydro-mulching techniques. As mentioned previously, seeds, fertilizer, and sprigs or stolons may be applied with the mulch in a one-step operation. This mulch usually loses its green color in direct sunlight after a week, but it does temper the microclimate so that the seedlings benefit from the mulch. This is also an excellent mulch for stolonized or sprigged lawns.

Another available mulch is chopped excelsior. This consists of shredded wood, chopped in lengths of about eight inches. This material can be applied either by hand or with conventional straw mulch spreading equipment. Chopped excelsior mulch can be applied with or without asphalt, but in residential areas the asphalt is usually objectionable. Excelsior at the rate of 2 tons per acre will give

good erosion control and conserve moisture on the newly seeded or sprigged lawns. However, on areas where frequent mowing in early establishment phases is desired, excelsior would be objectionable because the mulch would be scattered over the area by the action of the mower.

#### Water Soluble Latex Mulch For Home Lawns

Another manufactured mulch that can be used on home lawns is water soluble latex mulch. This mulch has to be applied with similar techniques as the wood fiber mulch. Upon evaporation of the water, a thin film of rubber which reduces soil erosion is left on the surface, but some seedling germination can be retarded by the latex and resinous mulches.

Several mulches are manufactured for use on critical areas. Examples of critical areas are ditches, fills, cuts, or exceptionally steep slopes which would not be sufficiently protected by ordinary mulches. One

of the most popular mulches for lawn critical areas is jute-net, which is a netting of woven jute twine. Jute-net is packaged in blanket type rolls and is held in place on the surface by wire staples. Grasses can be seeded or sprigged prior to application of the mulch. Another critical area mulch is woven paper. This is manufactured by several companies and will protect the soil from erosion for a period of one season while the grass is being established.

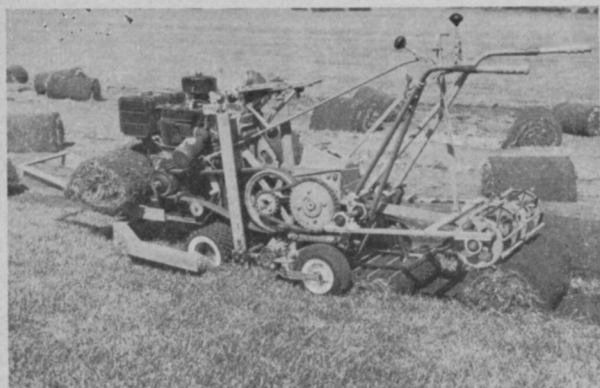
A more recent mulch now on the market is fiberglass. Fiberglass strands are applied with special equipment utilizing compressed air. A rate of 12 pounds of fiberglass per 100 square yards is recommended. The material is good for prevention of erosion, but it could possibly be objectionable if the lawn required close mowing during early establishment periods. This mulch does not deteriorate but becomes covered by soil and vegetation after about one season.

While mulches have several

advantages, there are some disadvantages. The use of straw mulch can increase or create weed problems. Manufactured mulches can increase costs and proper application of these mulches may be difficult due to the requirement of special equipment. Excess applications of any mulch can retard growth and reduce stands.

Regardless of the mulching technique or mulch used, lawn establishment will not be successful unless all necessary steps and good management are followed. These steps of good management would include proper fertilizing, mowing, and the controlling of turfgrass pests.

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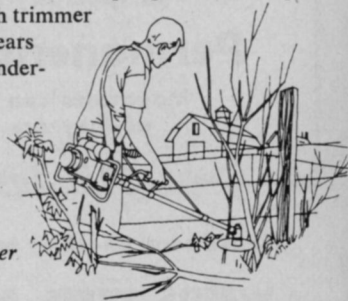
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