

Turf Renovation Without Tillage

Several reasons exist for renovation of turf areas. These include introduction of improved grass cultivars, reestablishment of grasses killed by weather, disease or insects and elimination of undesirable plants. Traditionally, renovation has involved tillage with a plow or rotavator and reseeding. This requires considerable effort, creates an erosion hazard on sloping sites and a loose seedbed that must be mulched and kept free of traffic until the new seeding is established. Also, perennial weedy grasses are frequently not controlled by tillage.

We have been able to successfully renovate turf areas by spraying herbicides to kill existing vegetation, dethatching or verticutting, and reseeding. If there is no reason to change the existing grade, this method may have several advantages over traditional methods that involve tilling the soil. Much less effort is required and the reseeded area will support traffic much sooner since the soil is not loosened. The erosion hazard is almost negligible even on sloping areas. As a bonus, few buried weed seeds are exposed, creating less of a weed problem in the new seeding, stones in the soil are not turned up, and straw mulch is not required for the new seeding. As with traditional methods, certain principles must be observed and definite procedures

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followed to insure successful renovation. The existing vegetation must be killed, most of the thatch removed, and seed planted in contact with soil. The seedings that we have made have been quite satisfactory.

The original problem that created poor turf condition must be corrected for renovation to be successful. If the poor turf was caused by excessive shade, poor drainage or too much traffic, these problems must be corrected before renovation will be satisfactory.

Killing existing vegetation. The herbicide glyphosate has been quite effective for killing existing vegetation in our trials. It is a broad spectrum herbicide effective on both grasses and broadleaf plants and with no residual activity in the soil. When properly applied, it is translocated and kills underground parts of plants as well as the tops. To be used effectively it should be applied to the foliage of actively growing plants and may not give satisfactory kill of plants that are under moisture stress or dormant. One application of it may not eradicate some hard to kill perennials such as quackgrass but is usually more

effective on these perennials than one or two tillage operations. After herbicide application, dethatching should be delayed from three to five days to allow the chemical to translocate into underground parts of the plants. It will have no effect on weed seeds germinating after seedings are made.

At present, Roundup by Monsanto Co., St. Louis, Mo., is labelled for use in non-crop areas and for application before emergence of wheat, oats, barley, sorghum, corn, and soybeans. Applications to turf areas followed by seeding has not yet been approved, although in our studies we have had excellent control of species present at time of spraying and no evidence of injury to seeded species. Even high rates of it applied at time of seeding have not affected establishment of several turfgrass species. It should not be used for turf renovation until approval for this purpose is obtained.

Dethatching. Established turf areas are often covered with thatch that varies in thickness, and most of this must be removed. The dethatcher should be operated until 10 to 30 percent bare soil is exposed and the debris removed. This may require several passes over the area with the dethatcher, and machines equipped with blades to slice the thatch are probably the most effective.

Seeding. In seeding, good seed-soil

contact is important and seeds falling on top of thatch will grow poorly or not at all. We have operated core aerifiers prior to seeding and later observed a tuft of grass seedlings growing in holes made by the aerifier. More effective, however, are vertical slicers adjusted to cut through remaining thatch and into the soil beneath. The blades should loosen the soil to a depth of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch and leave an open slit. Seeds falling into this shallow trench are in an excellent position to grow well when moisture and temperature conditions are satisfactory for germination. Seeders that slice the soil and drop seeds into the slit made by the knives are available.

A definite, stepwise procedure should be followed for successful renovation.

- Kill old vegetation. Be sure the plants in the area to be renovated are actively growing. If the renovation is performed in late summer, fertilization and irrigation may be necessary to insure active growth. For spring renovation, delay spraying until vegetation is actively growing and has been mowed at least once. Do not mow for several days before herbicide application to insure adequate leaf area for herbicide uptake. When approved, spray with two quarts per acre glyphosate in 30 to 40 gallons per acre water (1.5 oz. in three to four quarts water per 1000 square feet). Be careful when walking or moving equipment from areas freshly treated to untreated areas. Herbicide can be carried by traffic to untreated area and cause injury. We have had no problem with transporting the herbicide after a rain or for traffic delayed for several hours after application.

- Dethatch. Wait three to five days after spraying and operate the dethatcher to loosen and remove enough thatch so that 10 to 30 percent bare soil is exposed. Enough cover should be left to insure good footing for traffic when soil is moist. If thatch is completely removed in some areas, mulching may be necessary for a satisfactory seeding. Delaying the thatching operation less than three days will not reduce germination of seeded species, but may result in less than satisfactory kill of vegetation.



Verticutting.

- Fertilize. Using soil test information as a basis, apply lime and fertilizer needed for satisfactory grass growth. If more than 500 pounds fertilizer is required per acre, split the application and apply $\frac{1}{2}$ after grass is established.

- Seed. The last dethatching operation should leave grooves cut into the soil as a site for seed placement. Seeders equipped to cut grooves and drop seeds in the slots are good for renovation operations. Seed with cultivars and rate recommended for your area. Drag or rake seeded area lightly to provide some coverage of seeds.

While weeds germinating after seeding have been less of a problem in our trials than for conventionally prepared seedbeds, crabgrass has been present in some of our spring seedings. Suitable preemergence herbicides may be used if weed problems are anticipated.

In our renovation trials, we have seeded various Kentucky bluegrass cultivars with excellent results. The new plant becomes established at approximately the same rate expected for seedings made in conventionally prepared seedbeds. Ryegrass might be added to the seed mixture if quick cover is desired. We have not felt that a moderate amount of traffic was detrimental to the new seeding. Certainly, there is less of a problem with tracks in the seeded area because of the firm soil and little problem with tracking mud when the soil is moist as compared to conventional methods.

With the effective herbicide for vegetation control that has recently become available, renovation of turf areas should be possible with less effort and problems than for systems involving tillage. □



Closeup of area after verticutting.



Plugging and debris removal.



Closeup of cored and verticuted area.



Soil after preparation.



Final product.