

Tips on whether to reseed or renovate a client's lawn

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■ The lawn care operator/landscaper must decide whether a home lawn can be restored solely by applying seed and fertilizer, or whether complete renovation will give better results.

Reseeding—Drought damage alone seldom results in complete turfgrass loss, but it can cause a significant loss in turf density.

Seeding into established turfgrass can restore turfgrass density when it's been lost to adverse conditions. If at least 50 percent of the established turf survives, late summer/early fall reseeding is a viable option.

Kentucky bluegrass produces rhizomes and fills in voids. Generally, if the voids are the size of a softball or smaller, reseeding into Kentucky bluegrass turf isn't necessary. Reseeding will, however, help fill the voids faster if that's important.

If the primary turf species is perennial ryegrass or tall fescue, reseeding is usually necessary to improve density. The individual plants of these two species can increase in size through tilling, but neither possess the rhizoming capabilities like Kentucky bluegrass.

Overseeding: Overseeding with a drop or broadcast spreader is the most popular—and least expensive—way to introduce seed into an established lawn. Results improve after aerating or dethatching. This exposes the underlying soil for better seed/soil contact.

Still, the biggest drawback to overseeding is the low percentage of seeds which germinate and become established. Unless a significant amount of soil is exposed before seeding, the percentage of seed which ultimately establishes is less than with slice seeding, spot seeding or total renovation.

Slice seeding: Slice seeding is also per-

formed with only minor disturbance of the established turf.

Slit or slice seeders use vertical blades that cut small grooves in the soil. A disk is then used to direct the seed into the grooves. Some units also have press wheel attachments which firm the soil around the seed, thereby promoting seed/soil contact and enhancing seed germination.

Most turfgrass professionals offer slice seeding because homeowners cannot do it themselves. They lack the proper equipment.

Spot seeding: Spot seeding is usually performed on small, selected areas of the lawn where at least 50 percent of the turfgrass has been lost. Rake or otherwise physically remove dead grass and any thatch to expose the underlying soil.

The soil should be slightly raked/tilled before seeding. Then the seed and soil should be gently mixed. Using straw mulch helps preserve soil moisture, especially if irrigation is limited.

If large areas of the lawn have been lost, however, total renovation is probably the best option.

Total renovation—Renovation is also the best answer to too much thatch, infestations of perennial grass weeds or if the homeowner wants to upgrade the cultivar selections in the lawn.

Here are the steps in total renovation:

- 1) Conduct a soil test.
- 2) Make any necessary corrective nutrient applications or pH amendments.
- 3) Apply a non-selective, systemic herbicide to control all existing vegetation. (When the areas targeted for renovation contain perennial grass weeds, enough time should be allocated to make, if necessary, a second herbicide application to assure good control.)
- 4) Prepare the area for seeding/sodding after waiting seven days following the last application of herbicide. If excessive thatch layers (greater than one-half inch) exist, remove them. If not, mow the dead grass



Total lawn renovation is one of the best ways to defeat excessive thatch buildup.

to a height of one inch and then either till the area or access a slit-seeder.

If tilling, till to a depth of at least four inches, remove all rocks and debris, then finely grade the site.

5) Seed the desired species using either a drop or broadcast spreader, going in two directions.

6) Lightly mix, incorporating the seed into the soil.

7) Lightly roll the site.

8) Apply mulches such as straw, especially if irrigation is limited or the potential for erosion exists.

9) Starter fertilizer with an analysis ratio of 1-1-1 up to a 1-2-1 should be applied either at seeding or within two weeks after.

10) Irrigate as needed.

11) Begin mowing when grass grows to 2 or 2 1/2 inches.

12) Delay herbicide use until the following spring.

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