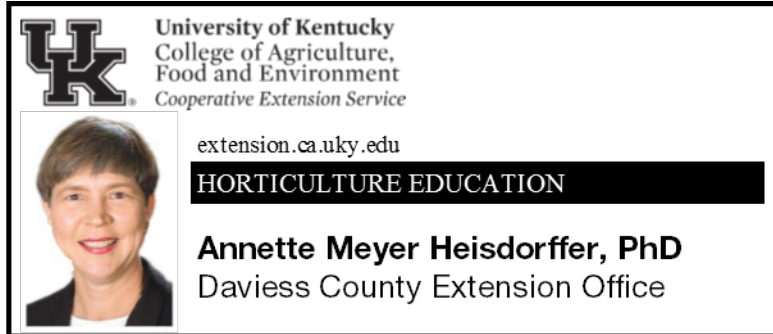# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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Process for Establishing a New Lawn
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Mid-August through September, when there is less weed competition and favorable temperatures, is the best time to establish a new lawn. Take the time now to prepare for the process and purchase seed to avoid missing this window.

Proper soil preparation is key. Establishing a new lawn involves soil tillage and destruction of existing grass. An advantage to tilling the soil is the ability to improve it by incorporating organic matter. Remember to call 811 before tilling the soil to mark utility lines.

It is easier to amend the soil before the lawn is established. Adding organic matter to the existing topsoil helps improve water drainage and reduces compaction. Peat moss, well-decomposed sawdust, well-rotted and weed-free manure, and compost will improve soil that is too sandy, contains too much clay, or is compacted. Use 2 to 3 cubic yards of organic matter for every 1000 square feet of lawn. Spread it evenly over the surface and roto-till or disk it into the upper 6 inches of soil before seeding. Do not work the soil when it's wet because the soil will compact more, thus losing the benefits of the organic matter.

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Next, test the soil to determine the need for lime or fertilizer. Soil can be tested through the county Cooperative Extension Service Office. Generally, the tests are completed in 10 to 14 days. Soil test results indicate if lime, phosphorus, or potassium are needed or not. After applying the recommended amount of fertilizer and lime if needed, work them into the top 4 to 6 inches of soil before seeding.

Allow the soil to settle through two or three good rains or irrigations. If the water puddles, drain or fill in these low spots. Good surface drainage is a must! The final seedbed should be firm, not compacted, and free of large clods and rocks.

When selecting seed for this area, turf-type tall fescue is the best grass for lawns. It has few insect and disease problems, competes well with most weeds, has good traffic tolerance, establishes relatively easily, has a widespread fertility range, tolerates full sun, adapts to wet and droughty soils or clay and sandy soils, and is recommended for areas with shade. Fine fescue can be used in the shade if the turf-type fescue will not grow there; however, the leaf texture and plant habit are different from turf-type fescue and still hard to grow in heavy shade.

Some cultivars of turf-type tall fescue with the best overall performance from University of Kentucky trials are Regenerate, Grade 3, Hemi, Bizem, Fesnova, Catalyst, Bullseye, Falcon IV, Falcon V, Terrano, and Firebird 2. These varieties are considered turf-type fescues and have a narrower leaf blade and better color than KY-31.   If you cannot find these varieties, any turf-type fescue is preferred because it's best for lawns. KY-31 is better suited for very low-maintenance sites or utility turf areas. Although tall fescue is normally a bunchgrass, when sown at the proper rate of 6 pounds per 1000 square feet, leaf coarseness or clumping is not a problem.

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Mixtures of tall fescue with other types of grass are not recommended because coarse and fine textures mixed make differences in blade widths noticeable. Under optimum conditions, the germination time for tall fescue is 7-10 days. However, it may take longer when moisture is lacking, when the surface soil temperature remains cold, or even when there are periods of wet/dry conditions. Germination also takes longer when old or poor quality seed is used or when new seed harvested in the summer is used for late summer seeding. This seed may have a short-term dormancy factor that slows down germination for several weeks.

Seeding the lawn can be accomplished with a rotary spreader. Seeding rate for tall fescue is 6 pounds per 1000 square feet. For uniform distribution of the seed, divide the seed into two equal lots with the second lot seeded at right angles to the first. The seed should be covered by raking over it lightly or rolling but avoid making a smooth surface.

The seeded area is covered with mulch such as straw that is as weed free as possible or other suitable material. The mulch should be spread thin enough to expose about 50 percent of the soil surface. It takes approximately one bale of straw per 1000 square feet of area. Water the newly seeded area frequently, especially if mulch is not used. Keep the soil surface moist until the grass seedlings become established.

After the tall fescue grass seedlings begin to grow, mow at the recommended height of 2.5 to 3 inches. Sharpen the mower blade so the grass leaf blade is cut cleanly and not torn. By mowing early and not letting excessive grass accumulate, the texture will be finer, many upright weeds will be killed, and the turf will become denser.

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For more information about establishing a new lawn, contact the Daviess County

Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or email at Annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

When purchasing seed, look for the words Certified seed in a block on the bag or on a tag

attached to the bag. Certified seed guarantees that what the tag states is in the bag. Typically,

Certified seed contains few weed seeds and the amount is on the tag. More information is

available in the publication "Lawn Establishment in KY"

(http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/AGR/AGR50/AGR50.pdf).