

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



August 6, 2022

Renovating the Lawn to Improve It

Heat and dry weather take a toll on cool season lawns. Renovating the lawn is a process involving replanting without tilling the soil and possibly without destroying the existing grass. The best time to renovate a cool-season lawn is mid-August through September.

A lawn needs renovating when more than 50% of the lawn contains weeds. In some situations, only a few patches need restoring.

During the renovation process, manage weeds first. In the lawn area that you are renovating apply a non-selective herbicide containing glyphosate (Roundup, Kleenup). Remember that glyphosate kills or injures plants that it touches. It works best when weeds are actively growing. Use the product according to label directions. Check the label to ensure the only active ingredient is glyphosate so that grass may be seeded before the end of September.

Depending on the type of weeds you are trying to control, the herbicide may need to be applied again before planting seed. For example, when trying to control Bermuda grass, 2 to 3 applications at 2 to 3 weeks apart are needed. Remember, you will have to reestablish the lawn in the herbicide-treated area. If you have questions about using an herbicide, please ask before

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

using it. After the final herbicide spraying, wait the number of days listed on the label before planting seed.

Next, test before seeding the lawn, to determine if lime, phosphate, and potash are needed. Testing for nitrogen is not included because science shows nitrogen is always required by growing plants.

Nitrogen should be applied soon after seed germination. If nitrogen is applied before seeding in the renovation process, weed growth is encouraged. Apply about 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Farm-type fertilizers, like urea, need to be applied when the lawn is dry and the weather is cool to prevent burning the grass leaves. Otherwise, the fertilizer needs to be watered in right after application; specialty organic turf fertilizers do not need to be watered in but may cost more.

After collecting a soil sample for testing, mow the lawn as close as possible. Then, prepare the seedbed. Seed will not germinate and grow properly if it is just broadcasted on the soil surface. The seed needs to have good contact with the soil. Using a slit seeder would work too as long the seed is sown in two directions.

If the thatch layer, a layer of tightly intermingled living and dead shoots, stems, and roots, is a half-inch or thicker, remove the thatch with a dethatching machine that has knives or blades. Machines with spring tines or mower attachment tines for dethatching are not effective for turf renovation. Pick up the thatch and remove it from the area before seeding the lawn. If the thatch is not over a half-inch thick, the dethatching machine would be handy over large areas to remove dead grass and disturb the soil for good seed contact.

Next, evenly broadcast the seed and rake it into the seed bed if you have a small area to renovate or cross the area again with the dethatching machine. Apply 6 pounds per

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

1000 square feet of a turf-type tall fescue variety on a lawn killed with herbicide.

Keep the newly-seeded area watered. In hot, windy weather, two or three light irrigations per day may be needed until germination is complete. Then water deeply and less frequently to encourage a deep root system. If the thatch is not completely removed, even more frequent watering is needed because the thatch tends to wick water from the seed and almost eliminate germination.

To thicken a tall fescue lawn with no weed problems, prepare the seed bed with a coring machine that removes 2- to 3-inch long cores of soil from the top and redeposits them on the surface. After making several coring machine passes over the area, seed the lawn. Then drag a section of chain link fence or rake over the area to obtain good seed to soil contact.

It is important to mow the renovated lawn frequently to keep the old existing grass from shading the new seedlings. As new seedlings develop, continue mowing at the height intended for the entire area.

Very small bare spots in lawns can be renovated without destroying existing grass. Prepare the seed bed by broadcasting the seed on the soil surface, then cover the seed with about one-quarter inch of topsoil or sand. You can also use a shovel to remove clumps of grass, dead turf, and the soil to a depth of one-half inch and repair the area with sod.

Do not sow the grass seed too thick because it can encourage an environment more favorable for disease development. For more information, see <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/agr/agr51/agr51.pdf>, or contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or at annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tips:

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

Free soil tests for Daviess County residents are available through a grant from the Daviess County Soil Conservation Service. Testing the soil for nutrients in the garden, lawn, or landscape is recommended every three to four years and before beginning new projects.

A turf type tall fescue is the best cool season grass type for our area.

Upcoming Event:

National Farmers Market week is August 7-13. Visit the Owensboro Regional Farmers' Market at 1205 Triplett Street for fresh, locally grown produce, flowers, meats, and value added products. The market is open Tuesdays 8:00 a.m. to noon, Thursday evenings 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., and Saturdays 8:00 a.m. to noon.

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