

Fall Lawn Management and Renovation Following Summer Lawn Woes

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October, 2007

Now that the drought and heat has extended into fall, would it be better to wait until spring to renovate or do the best you can at this time? To get quickest and most permanent lawn grass recovery fall is almost always the best time, even if it is late into the fall or early winter before certain maintenance chores can be accomplished. Most important in the fall is:

Nitrogen fertilization. Following a good, soaking rainfall an application of nitrogen is critical to jump-start the healing process. Even though portions of the lawn may look dead, there will always be some recovery of Ky bluegrass or tall fescue. Available nitrogen will force growth of newly developing tillers and recovery of dormant tillers will often be much more prevalent than tillers from planted seed. Certainly this is true with Ky bluegrass because it is very slow to germinate, has poor seedling vigor and is not competitive with many fall germinating weeds.

The normal rate of nitrogen for fall applications is 1 to 1.5 lbs of actual nitrogen per 1000 sq ft. A readily available nitrogen source is preferred because you do need immediate results. Ag fertilizers containing ammonium nitrate (34-0-0) or urea (46-0-0) are great and because the temperature is cooler in the fall, there is little chance of getting burn. Most garden center fertilizers work great also, especially if they contain 25% or less of slow release (WIN) nitrogen. To get 1.5 lbs. N/ 1000 sq ft., it requires 3# ammonium nitrate, 3.3 # urea, 15# 10-10-10, 5# 20-5-10, etc.

If recovery is occurring, repeat applications of nitrogen can be made every 4 to 6 weeks until late December or early January. This is most necessary if seeding new grass and or controlling a thick weed cover. Complete fertilizers like 10-10-10,

that also supply phosphorus and potassium, are seldom necessary on older lawns but the only way to know for sure it to get a soil test.

Residual crabgrass should not cause a problem with turfgrass recovery because it will completely die with the first heavy frost. Thick stands of broadleaf weeds like chickweed, henbit and clover will compete with new grass tillers and broadleaf weed control will be necessary. October and early November are the best time of year to apply these broadleaf weed sprays.

Renovation Method. As a follow-up to the August article “Evaluating and Renovating Drought-Stricken Lawns” it is important to note that new seeding is still an excellent option to get tall fescue established. Certainly it is better accomplished before October 15 but with the extended drought and heat that we have experienced, it is still a great option but with a little higher risk of poor establishment because of impending cold weather. However, unless you can frequently irrigate, it will likely be important to wait until you get a soaking rainfall before attempting to seed.

The question we often get is “can I just broadcast the seed or must I incorporate (power seed)?” When choosing the method to seed, consider the following:

Power/Slit Seeding (seed incorporation) **Necessary If:**

Timing other than late summer, fall or very early spring

Soil is heavy clay and hard, i.e. the seed will only stay in place if the soil surface is grooved, punched or otherwise disturbed

Moisture is frequently lacking, i.e. rainfall or irrigation is inconsistent or not available

Live cover (turf and/or weeds) greater than 50%



Optimum Method - Tall fescue Power Seeded into killed Ky bluegrass turf.

Broadcast Seeding (without slits) **Possible** if:

Soil is loose and friable

Live cover (grass and weeds) is less than 50% and will not overly compete with germinating seedlings

The presence of matted-down grass on the surface is disturbed with a rake or chain drag to expose the soil surface for good soil-seed contact.

Or, one can broadcast the seed and force the seed to the soil surface by directing high pressure water from a garden hose onto the surface.

A thick turf and/or weed cover is killed with Rd Up a few days before seeding

Irrigation can be applied frequently to keep the surface moist for about two weeks

Germinating weeds like chickweed can be selectively controlled

If appropriate seed timing, i.e. late summer, early fall or early spring

Seeded specie germinates in a week or two and has good seedling vigor; best=perennial ryegrass or tall fescue. Ky bluegrass seldom successfully established without conventional seedbed preparation.

No allopathic species present in seedbed. Surviving (live) perennial ryegrass may emit root exudates that prevent germination of tall fescue or Ky bluegrass.

Establishment success will greatly improve if area is aerified to disturb about 25 to 50% of the surface soil or area is verticut (dethatched) to groove the surface soil, thus creating a seedbed.



Forcing seed to soil surface with high pressure water from hose.



Green plots broadcast seeded with tall fescue or perennial ryegrass into killed Ky bluegrass.