Selecting a Florida Lawn Grass

Selecting a Florida Lawn Grass - The two primary methods of establishing turfgrass are seed and vegetative propagation. Vegetative propagation includes sodding, sprigging and plugging. Although propagating vegetatively is labor-intensive, all warm-season grasses can be planted by this method. Seeding is usually the easiest and most economical method of planting grasses, but not all warm-season grasses can establish from seed. It also requires a longer period of time to have complete grass cover.

Regardless of the method of planting, it is essential that a proper seedbed be prepared before planting. A healthy, attractive, long-lived lawn can be established only if you select high quality seed or planting material and select turfgrasses that are well adapted to the soil and climate. Please use this link for our step by step planting guide.

Seeding

Seeding is the easiest and most economical way of establishing a lawn. Success depends on seed quality, proper seeding time, rate, and method of seeding.

Click Here to view our Florida Lawn Grass Seed products

Seed Quality

In order to successfully establish a lawn from seed, top quality seed must be used. Federal and state laws require that each container of seed have a tag listing turfgrass species and cultivar, purity, percent germination and weed content. Purity tells the amount (as a percentage) of the desired seed and any other seed and inert matter. Percent germination tells the amount of seed expected to germinate under optimum conditions. The quantity of weed seeds is also listed. Read the tag thoroughly to be sure you are purchasing good quality seed. Try to purchase seed that has a purity of 90% or higher and a germination of 85% or higher. Always select the best quality seed of the cultivar you wish to plant. Many times contractors buy seed with poor (<50%) germination and poor purity (<80%) in order to save money. Usually this results in weed invasion and/or poor stand establishment.

Seeding Time and Rate

The best time to seed warm-season grass is during the spring and summer months from April through July, since this permits a full growing season before cold weather. Seed may be planted as late as September or early October, but establishment is much slower because of cooler weather. In south Florida, year-round planting may produce a good quality lawn. In north Florida, young seedling grasses may be winter-killed if they are planted too late in the fall. Spring and summer seeding also takes advantage of Florida's rainy season and may greatly reduce irrigation requirements. Rates vary with species and cultivar of grass. Economics must be considered since certain turfgrass seeds are quite expensive, and therefore optimum seeding rates are not always practical. The seeding rates suggested will give adequate coverage and produce a mature lawn with good post-planting care. Rates vary from 4 ounces per 1000 square feet for centipedegrass, which has a very small seed, to 10 pounds per 1000 square feet for bahiagrass, which has a large seed. Seeding rates can be reduced, but the trade-off is a more open turf area subject to weed invasion and erosion.

A hard, impermeable seed coat that restricts the entrance of water or gases into the seed can prevent or seriously delay germination even under favorable conditions. Seed germination is enhanced by scarification processes that disrupt the impermeable coat and permit the entrance of moisture and gases. Bahiagrass seed is often scarified either by soaking in a mild acid solution for a period of time or by physical abrasion to help remove its impermeable seed coat. Bahiagrass seed that has been scarified has an increased germination percentage.

Many seeding methods are used, ranging from planting by hand to the use of mechanical equipment for large turf areas. No matter what method you use, it's important to distribute seeds evenly to keep the lawn uniform. The seedbed should be moist, well prepared, and leveled. Rake the entire area with a heavy garden rake to produce furrows into which the seeds are planted. Seed should be applied mechanically either with a drop-type or rotary spreader. Mechanical seeders provide a more uniform distribution of seed than hand seeding. For best distribution of seed, apply one-half the required amount in one direction and apply the remainder at right angles to the first seeding. When sowing very small seed like centipedegrass and bermudagrass, you will find the seed is more easily and uniformly applied if you mix it with sand, top soil, or another convenient carrier that adds bulk to the spreader.

After sowing, cover the seed lightly by working it into the soil with a rake. Ideally, seed should be topdressed with ¼ to ½ inch of soil, but this may not be practical for most home lawns. In the absence of topdressing, seeds can be covered reasonably well by raking. If the seedbed was furrowed before seeding, then raking or dragging with a board will work the seed into the furrows and adequately cover it. Roll the seeded area with a lightweight roller to firm up the soil and to ensure good contact between seed and soil. The area should then be mulched with weed-free grass, hay, or straw, so that 50 to 75% of the bare ground is protected (Figure 5). Mulching helps conserve soil moisture, moderates soil temperature, and prevents erosion of topsoil and washing of seed. As a general rule, 1 bale of hay will cover approximately 1000 square feet.

Proper watering is the most critical step in establishing turfgrasses from seed. The soil must be kept continuously moist but not excessively wet until seeds have germinated. Supplying water two or three times a day in small quantities for approximately 2 weeks will ensure adequate moisture for germination. If the surface of the soil is allowed to dry out at any time after the seeds have begun to swell and before roots have developed, many of the seedlings will die. Improper watering is the most common cause of seeding failure. Initial watering should be from a fine spray if possible, or from sprinklers with a low precipitation rate. Coarse spray and high water pressure or high precipitation rates will wash the soil and uncover buried seeds. Avoid overwatering and saturating the soil. This can cause the seeds to float, and increases the incidence of disease which can kill the seedling plants. As the seedlings mature and root systems develop, the number of waterings can decrease, but the volume should increase so that the entire root zone is wetted, not just the soil surface. If water is not available, avoid planting in April, May and October since these are traditionally Florida's driest months.

Courtesy of http://turf.ufl.edu/