

Sodding: Steps to an Instant Lawn

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Sodding

Lawns can enhance urban/suburban environments by stabilizing soil (dust and mud), reducing storm water runoff, reducing rodents and other household pests, enhancing security/safety (improved sightlines), and dissipating heat. An attractive lawn also provides an ideal setting for your home, landscape, and recreation. Lawns may be successfully established by seeding, sodding, sprigging, or plug-planting. Sodding is the quickest and most efficient method when time and appearance are major considerations.

Sod is fully mature lawn grass grown on highly specialized farms. Sod growers give constant and careful attention to fertilizing, mowing, watering, and weed and other pest control to provide an attractive and dense carpet of grass. When mature, the sod can be cut to various widths and lengths. Immediately after cutting, the strips are folded or rolled and transported to the site for placement.

Advantages of Sod

When deciding to establish a new lawn or renovate an old one, consider the advantages of sod:

- Establishes rapidly – in a matter of hours you can convert a barren area into an attractive carpet of green lawn. A long establishment period is avoided.
- Ensures success – takes the guesswork out of creating a new lawn and eliminates the risk of seeding failures.
- Extends the lawn establishment season – can be placed at any time of the year that soil can be properly prepared and sod is available.
- Stabilizes soil – eliminates dust and mud and provides immediate protection against soil erosion or washouts.
- Bypasses weed problems—annual bluegrass, crabgrass, chickweeds, and other weeds that normally threaten newly seeded lawns don't stand a chance in dense sod.

Select High-Quality Sod

High-quality sod contains a blend or mixture of desirable lawn grasses that adapted to New Jersey's climate is available. Kentucky bluegrass is the most popular and is used extensively in the production of sod. Numerous Kentucky bluegrass varieties are available for sod production. Additionally, turf-type varieties of tall fescue and the fine fescues are becoming more widely used. See RCE publication FS 738 **New Jersey Seed Standards for Sod Certification** for a listing of suggested use of grass species and varieties for New Jersey. Select a blend containing two or more Kentucky bluegrass varieties for a wider range of adaptability.

Kentucky bluegrasses are best adapted to open sunny areas. In a shade situation, avoid using a sod containing only Kentucky bluegrasses if at all possible. A sod including fine fescues is better adapted to shady lawns. Among the Kentucky bluegrass varieties, Eclipse, Glade, Able I, America, Bristol, Ram I, 1757, Touchdown, or A-34 are the best choices for shade.

Sod containing improved turf-type tall fescues, in combination with Kentucky Bluegrass, is available. Its use should be considered for lower maintenance lawns, heavily trafficked areas, and the sandier soil of Southern New Jersey.

When selecting sod, be sure it is of high quality and grown on a well-managed sod farm. To obtain high-quality sod:

- Be sure it is New Jersey certified sod as indicated by an appropriate blue certification label, or
- Visit the sod farm to observe the condition of the sod.

Prepare the Soil for Sodding

Although sodding can provide a new lawn in a matter of hours, proper preparation of the soil before placement is



essential for turf survival. Sod placed on existing lawns, compact infertile soils, or carelessly prepared areas will not produce satisfactory results. To prepare the soil:

- If renovating an old lawn, strip the old grass and thatch layer to bare soil, or destroy it with herbicide and a rototiller.
- Grade to a desired slope, fill in depressions, and provide a gentle downgrade from buildings. If the existing soil is very poor, establish a subgrade and cover the area with at least a 4-inch layer of high quality, weed-free topsoil. If a high quality topsoil is not available, consider incorporating a high-quality compost into the existing soil. Rototilling 4 or more inches of a compost applied over the soil is suggested.
- Add organic matter to very sandy or clayey soils. Sources of organic matter include leaf compost, composted sludge or manure, and peat moss. Apply an even layer 2 to 4 inches deep.
- Apply ground or pulverized limestone according to soil test results.
- Apply 30 to 40 lbs of 5-10-10 fertilizer (or a similar starter fertilizer) per 1,000 square feet. A soil test is strongly recommended to guide fertilization of the lawn after the application of a starter fertilizer.
- Incorporate all added materials thoroughly into the soil with a rototiller to a depth of at least 6 inches.
- Rake to a smooth level grade, and lightly roll the area to provide a firm bed.

Place Sod Carefully

Placing sod is a simple procedure, but it requires adhering to a few steps:

- Prepare the area before scheduling delivery of sod. Moisten the soil with a light sprinkling of water if it is powdery-dry.
- Place sod immediately after delivery – within 12 hours in warm weather. With cooler temperatures, it can be kept for several days if necessary. Store delivered sod under shade if possible to avoid overheating and desiccation.
- Unfold or unroll the sod strips in place and carefully fit edges together. Avoid overlapping and space between sod pieces. Stagger placement of the strips to give a brick-type effect. Begin at the bottom of slopes, placing the strips horizontally.
- Roll immediately after placement to improve contact of sod with the soil.

- Water thoroughly as soon as a sizable area is sodded – within 30 minutes on hot days. The period from placement to knitting of roots into the soil is very critical. Maintain a moist condition by watering as frequently as necessary. Check the moisture by lifting corners of sod pieces occasionally. Do not allow the sod to dry out, but, excessive watering (ponding) is also detrimental.

Maintain and Enjoy Your Lawn

A high-quality sod properly placed will immediately impart a natural appearance of a well-groomed mature lawn. Growth of both leaf blades and roots will begin at once. Usually within a week, the roots will show signs of knitting to the soil. Knitting may be slower at temperatures above 85°F.

To maintain its attractive appearance, your lawn will require proper care. Devote attention to:

- Mowing – begin as soon as topgrowth reaches a height of 3 to 4 inches. Mow as frequently as necessary to keep topgrowth within twice the height of mowing. Set the mower to cut no closer than 2 inches, (2-1/2 to 3-1/2 is suggested), and keep blades sharp and properly adjusted at all times so that you are never cutting more than half the grass blade (1/3 is preferable).
- Watering – after the sod knits to the soil, change to an infrequent but thorough watering program. Wetting the soil to a depth of 6 inches once every 5 to 10 days during drought periods is adequate for many soils. Some sandier soils in Southern New Jersey may require watering the lawn every 3 to 5 days during drought.
- Fertilizing – the newly sodded lawn will contain adequate nutrients for at least 6 weeks after placement. When it begins to show a loss of green color and growth, fertilizing is usually needed as long as soil moisture is adequate. Apply fertilizer based on results of a soil test to maintain the desired color and growth. Fertilize adequately but do not over fertilize, particularly during the summer months.
- Liming – apply pulverized or ground limestone based on a soil test once every 3 years.
- Insects and Weeds – properly identify pest problems and apply appropriate treatments.

(Adapted from “Steps to an Instant Lawn” compiled originally by the Cultivated Sod Association of New Jersey, Inc.).

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