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## EC68-1212 Building a Bluegrass Lawn

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Wayne Whitney

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# Building a BLUEGRASS LAWN



EXTENSION SERVICE  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS  
AND U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING  
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# Building a Bluegrass Lawn

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A beautiful lawn is the carpet for your yard. It will serve as the foundation for your entire landscape. A lawn can be used as the special area to be viewed or it can serve as the backdrop for roses, flower beds and other plantings.

When establishing a lawn, consider these things:

## Grade

Before grading, remove the top soil. You can place the soil in a pile and distribute it over the lawn area after the grading has been completed.

You should anticipate drainage problems from your neighbor's yard as well as your own. Providing drainage areas away from your home, flower beds and rock walls is very important.

Eliminate low spots in the lawn area which allow water to stand. If these areas exist after grading, you may need to tile to provide proper drainage.

The grade or slope of the yard is important. You must consider the activity planned for a particular area.

Provide a slope of one foot in the first ten feet away from the house. Beyond ten feet from the house, the slope may be one foot to sixteen feet.

## Soil

Bluegrass is tolerant to a wide range of soil types. Turf can be established on new areas where the topsoil has been removed. These areas usually require more fertilizer.

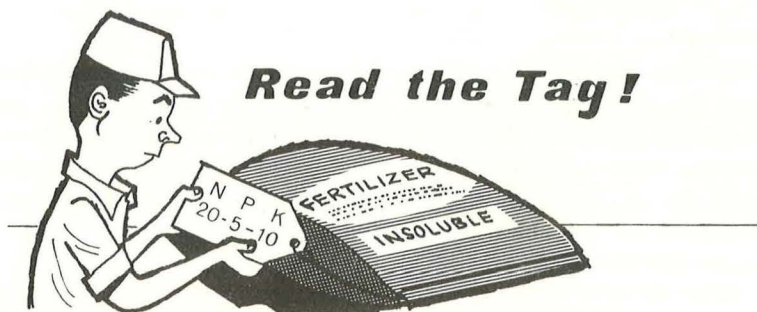
Before you prepare your seed bed, take a soil sample. A bulletin on "How To Take A Soil Sample" and a soil sample box can be obtained from your county Extension office. Take the sample to your county Extension office to be forwarded to the University of Nebraska for testing. The soil test report and letter of recommendation will indicate the fertilizer and lime needs of your soil. You should add the required plant food when you prepare the seed bed.

Organic material, such as compost, peat, or well-rotted barnyard manure, may be used as a soil conditioner. There are many advantages in adding these organic materials to the soil before seeding or sodding. They improve the soil tilth, increase water intake and holding capacity, and help prevent erosion.

## Lawn Fertilizer

When buying fertilizer, read the tag on the bag. The soil test which you have already taken will help determine the kind of fertilizer to buy.



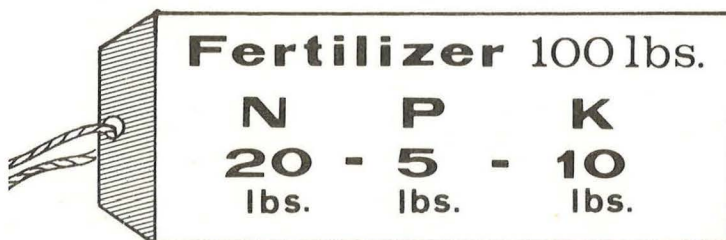


## Read the Tag!

There are two main types of fertilizers: *soluble* (fast release) and *insoluble* (slow release). Soluble fertilizers release their nitrogen quickly. *Insoluble (slow release) fertilizers release nitrogen at a slower rate.* This allows a more uniform release of nitrogen over a longer period of time and reduces the possibility of damage from fertilizer.

Most lawn fertilizers will list the amount of soluble and insoluble nitrogen. This will give you an indication of the rate of release. The insoluble nitrogens generally cost more to produce. The soluble, or totally available nitrogens, are quickly available and the least expensive to produce. These are the types that are often associated with farm fertilizers and will not be as long lasting as the insoluble material.

Most fertilizers are sold on the basis of how much primary plant nutrient elements they contain. These elements are nitrogen, phosphate, and potash. These elements will be abbreviated on the analysis tag as N (nitrogen), P or  $P_2O_5$  phosphorous (phosphate), and K or  $K_2O$  (potash). By reading the fertilizer tag and comparing these figures, you can determine the content of the fertilizer you are buying.



A complete fertilizer is one that contains all of the primary elements: nitrogen, phosphate, and potash. They may be contained in varying amounts.

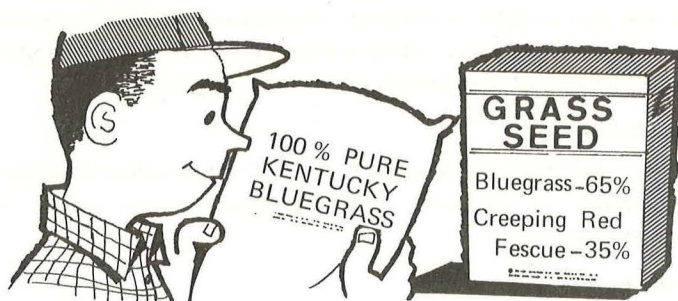
Fertilizers should be applied before working the seed bed. The amount of fertilizer required will differ from one lawn to another. When establishing a new lawn, you should apply at least 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet.

Actual amounts of any element will correspond with the percentage of that element listed on the analysis tag in each 100 pounds of fertilizer. For example: 100 pounds of a fertilizer with the analysis of 20-5-10 contains 20 pounds of actual nitrogen, 5 pounds of actual phosphate, and 10 pounds of actual potash.

Apply lime only if your soil test indicates a need for it. If lime is needed, incorporate it in the soil before seeding or sodding.

### Seed Selection

Good seed is a bargain. When buying seed, read the tag on the bag to determine the percentage of germination, purity, and amount of weed seed. Poor quality seed is not a bargain at any price. Seeding a lawn requires time, and time you cannot buy. After you devote expense, labor, and time to this project, you expect a high quality turf. A single step like selecting seed can mean the difference between success or failure.



Kentucky bluegrass is one of the best turf grasses in this area. A fine, even texture can be obtained with the seeding of pure bluegrass. It is hardy in a wide range of soil types.

Kentucky bluegrass is generally not as expensive as some of the large seeded grasses when you compare the number of seeds contained in one pound. Kentucky bluegrass contains about 2 million seeds per pound, while rye grass contains about 1/4 million seeds per pound.

A pure seeding of Kentucky bluegrass is generally best. If you have shaded areas in your lawn you may want to plant a grass that is shade tolerant. Creeping red fescue and Kentucky bluegrass are two of the most shade-tolerant species.

Don't confuse the creeping type fescue with tall fescue. Tall fescues are not desirable in a fine textured turf. Many of the cheap seed mixes contain large amounts of tall fescue.

A seed mixture may contain bluegrass and creeping red fescue. A desirable seed mix should contain 65 percent bluegrass and 35 percent creeping red fescue. If you want a seed mixture, buy bulk pure seed of the varieties you wish to plant and mix them yourself.

## **Seed Bed Preparation**

Preparing the seed bed is very important in establishing a new lawn. Organic materials and fertilizer should be added before tilling the seed bed. Incorporate them into the soil before seeding.

Roto-tilling or disking the lawn area will usually be sufficient.

It is very important to have a level, firm seed bed. Watering will help to firm the seed bed prior to seeding and will also aid in settling loose soil. Watering the area and working the surface for a level site will produce a firm seed bed as well as a smooth site for your future lawn.

## **Fall Seeded Lawns**

Fall is the best time to seed a bluegrass lawn. A fall seeded lawn should be established from mid-August to mid-September. Begin the seed bed preparation during the last part of July.

After the soil is tilled, a thorough watering will add sub-soil moisture as well as germinate weed seeds. Allow a week or two after watering, then work the top one inch of soil to kill newly germinated weed seeds.

## **Spring Seeded Lawns**

In spring, seed the lawn as soon as the soil is in a workable condition and the temperature is moderate. This condition usually occurs between mid-March and mid-April.

## **Seeding the Lawn**

The amount of seed applied will vary, depending on the seed size. Seed Kentucky bluegrass at the rate of two to three pounds per 1000 square feet. Seed may be distributed either with a seeder or by hand. Application of seed with a seeder is more uniform.

When hand seeding, mix the seed with sand, soil, or cornmeal to increase the volume and give better distribution.

Improved seed coverage may be obtained by applying one-half the recommended amount of seed going the length and the other half going the width of your yard.

## **Mulching**

Newly seeded areas should be mulched. This saves considerably on the amount of watering required before grass is established. Mulching will reduce the amount of crusting on heavy soils. Peat moss, burlap, straw, prairie hay, salt grass or netting may be used. If straw or prairie hay is used, attempt to remove weed seeds from this material by shaking it out on a concrete driveway where the weed seeds may be swept up.

## Watering

Sprinkle the newly seeded lawn immediately after applying the mulch. Apply straw or hay mulches thin enough to allow shading without matting. The surface of a newly seeded lawn should be kept in a moist but not in a wet condition. This may require several waterings per day, depending on weather conditions. As the grass grows, fewer waterings applied slowly for deep penetration will encourage deep rootings. This will provide a hardier, more drought-resistant lawn.

Mow the grass when it is 2 to 2 1/2 inches high. Your new lawn may require a light application of fertilizer after the second or third mowing.