

Gethsemane Garden Center 101 Learning Series

Lawn Care

Growing turf can be easier than you think and is very beneficial.

Not only can your grassy knoll be used for a soft play area for children and picnics, it improves the air quality by producing oxygen. According to James B Beard Ph.D, chief scientist at the International Sports Turf Institute, a healthy lawn provides excellent soil erosion control, improves the quality and protection of groundwater, absorbs and sequesters carbon dioxide gases, aids substantially to urban heat dissipation, and creates a high visibility zone that can deter potential intruders. There are several basic steps that, if followed, will ensure a beautiful low-maintenance lawn.

The very first things you will need to do are:



1. Send out a soil sample to get it tested. This will inform you about what nutrients it is rich in or lacking, and in which type of soil you will be planting. (clay, sand, humus rich, etc)
2. Augment your soil and pitch of your landscape to provide the best growing conditions.
3. Select which grass seed will grow best based on the light exposure and soil type. i.e. Sun/Shade, Full Sun, Dense Shade
4. Purchase the material and tools you will need.

Must Haves For A Healthy Lawn

Light and Climate

Determine how much sun your planting area will have. Certain types of turf can only grow in specific climates. Your local garden center will carry the seed that is best in your region.

Water

This may be the most difficult of the steps. There is no hard and fast rule, because the weather conditions are constantly changing. However, a good rule to follow is, 1"-1.5" of water per week.

Filling in the gaps

Rake in evenly approximately .5" of top soil over existing lawn to fill in any low spots. Wait a week or two for it to settle. If this process is repeated several times, eventually the low spots will be gone and scalping when mowing will no longer occur.

Fertilizing

The optimum times of year to fertilize are mid to late Spring when the forsythias are blooming and early to mid Fall, before the first frost. If only fertilizing once, mid-October is best. We recommend using an organic fertilizer, or compost to increase the health of your soil rather than using chemicals.

Best Time To Plant

The best time to plant the seed to give them a solid start is in mid-September.

*Quick grow grass is usually an annual grass and good for a temporary fix.



Step By Step Lawn Reseeding Basics

- Step 1:** Have your soil tested to determine correct PH and blend of soil nutrients for proper turf growth. (See the tips section for a website to obtain the closest testing center.)
- Step 2:** Supplement your soil as needed based on the recommendations from the soil testing facility.
- Step 3:** Rake your pre-existing lawn or planting area firmly but not too vigorously to remove the old dead grass and loosen the soil. Only do this when the area is dry, so as to not compress the soil any further.
- Step 4:** Determine any low or high spots in the lawn. Smooth them out or fill in these areas with a mixture of top soil and compost as necessary to facilitate even drainage and decrease the chance of rot and disease.
- Step 5:** Sprinkle a thin layer of top soil, leftover potting soil or compost (we recommend compost or a compost/top soil mix) over the area to be seeded. An eighth to quarter of an inch will be plenty to help keep the seed protected from the wind and keep moisture on the seeds. *Although a common practice, using peat moss instead of soil tends to hold too much moisture to the seed and can cause rotting or non-germination. It also does not work it's way into the soil surrounding the grass as it begins to grow and can cause rotting.
- Step 6:** Spread (sow) the grass seed according to the broadcast guides on the back of the seed package. (with grass and fertilizer the word broadcast refers to the rate at which the seed or fertilizer is dispersed.) You may need to purchase a seed spreader if working in a large area. Spread a "New Seed" fertilizer or a composted cow manure at this time as well, otherwise you will need to wait until the lawn has established itself. Then, gently run a rake through the entire area to plant the seed.
- Step 7:** Water. For the first couple of weeks prior to the grass showing growth it is essential to keep the seeds evenly moist. If it is particularly windy, sunny, and/or hot you may want to give them a quick drink in the early morning or evening after dinner. *DO NOT SOAK THEM. Once the grass has begun to show, it is best to water in the early evening when the sun has begun to set. This will ensure the grass is getting the most benefit from the water without a lot of evaporation. After you start to see green, be sure to give your grass 1"-1.5" of water a week. This is a very generalized rule and will vary based on the location you have planted, how hot it is, the amount of wind, and several other factors. If the grass seems like it is drooping, yellowing, or the soil surrounding the grass is cracking...water.
- Step 8:** Even if you have spread a "New Seed" fertilizer or composted cow manure at the time of planting, you will want to fertilize the grass in the fall and then again in the Spring after the snow has melted and the ground is at about 55 degrees. For Chicago and the surrounding areas that is usually mid-April for the Spring feeding and late September to mid-October for the Fall feeding. Feeding your lawn in the hot summer months may cause scalding, especially if you are not using an organic fertilizer. We recommend spreading compost or using organic fertilizers to increase the over-all health of your soil. Think of it as providing proper nutrition rather than the occasional supplement.
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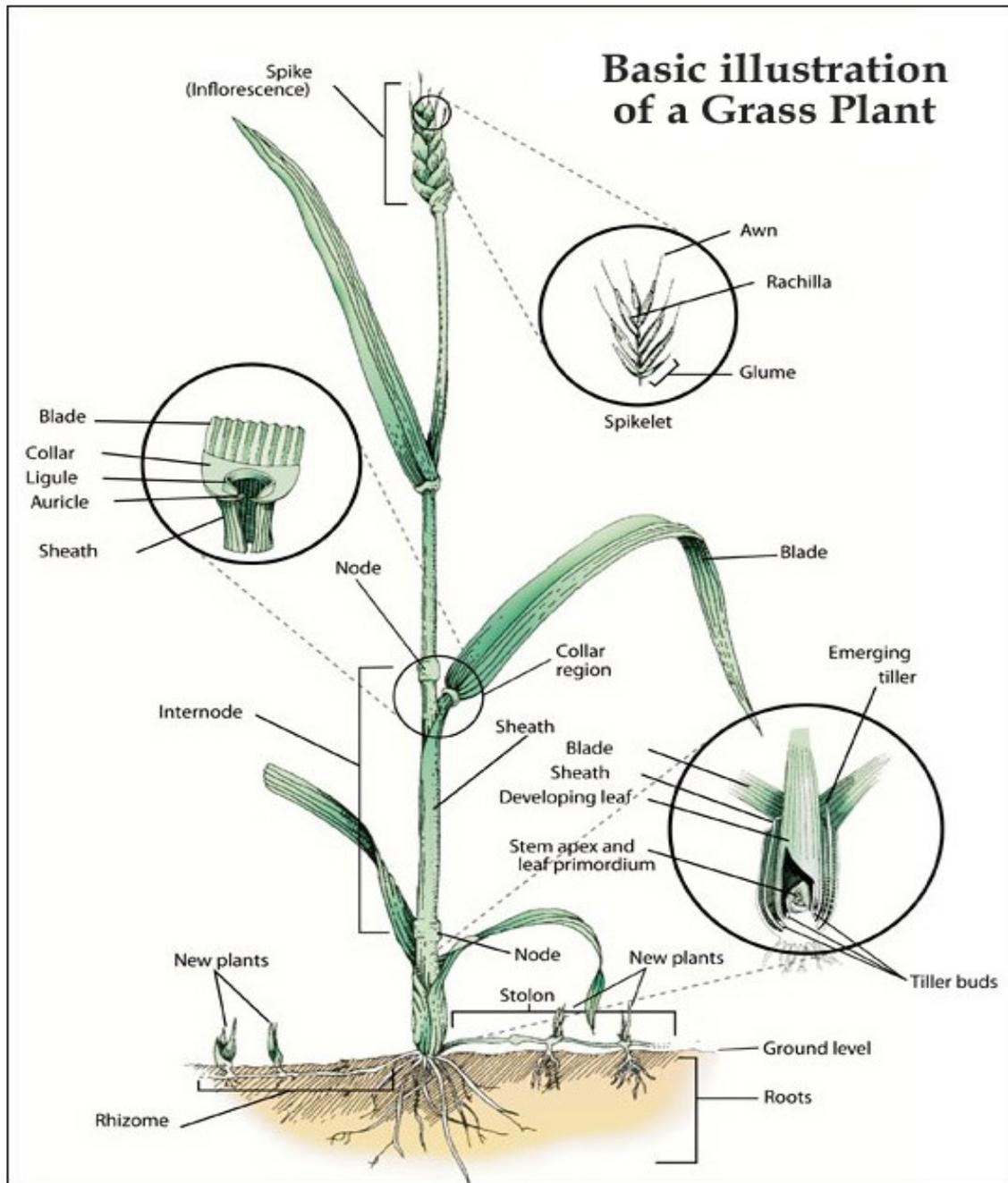


Checklist of Supplies Needed

- Soil Test Kit
- Steel Pronged Rake
- Grass Seed
- Hose and/or sprinkler
- Fertilizer
- Top soil and/or compost for a light covering of the seeds
- Seed spreader (can be used for spreading fertilizer)

Tips From The Experts

- ◆ To find the best type of grass seed for your area, ask your local garden center expert or for more in depth information go to:
<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/turfgrassfaq2.html>
 - ◆ Apply a final dose of organic fertilizer in Mid-October to provide your grass with some extra nutrients for a heartier Spring growth.
 - ◆ When you mow, cut off only the top third of the grass blade. Remember to raise your mower height gradually, by quarters, as the temperatures increase. Cutting the lawn too short can kill the grass, make it more susceptible to disease and weeds, and prevent deep strong root growth for a lush hearty lawn. * Keep the lawn at a height of 3.5" to prevent weed growth and maintain a healthier lawn.
 - ◆ If you are experiencing irregular brown patches, you may have grubs. Pull up a section of the brown grass and look for white larvae. If present, purchase a granular grub removal product and rake it in evenly through the entire lawn.
 - ◆ DO NOT apply weed killer after May, wait until the weather gets cooler in September or October. If you experienced a weed problem last year, spray or spread an herbicide in late April across your entire lawn.
 - ◆ For information or more assistance re-grading your lawn around the foundation of the house, the following website may be helpful: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5hYIda7tWqA>
 - ◆ For soil testing please visit the University of Illinois Extension's list of recommended facilities at : <http://urbanext.illinois.edu/soiltest/>
 - ◆ Organic corn gluten and other pre-emergent weed prevention products have to be applied in the early Spring before the ground reaches 55 degrees in the top 2" of soil consistently for 3-4 days. For our area the best time to apply is mid-March to the first week of April.
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