



Planting A New Lawn

Selection of Lawn Type

Kentucky Bluegrass is by far the most common type of lawn grass grown in Western Colorado. There are many different varieties of Bluegrass, and they vary in their fertility needs, reaction to weather conditions, disease resistance, and other characteristics. It's best to plant a mixture of varieties to take advantage of each of their strengths. At Bookcliff Gardens, we carry a mixture of premium varieties of Bluegrass which are proven to thrive here. Bluegrass is a creeping type grass, has deep green color and soft, fine texture. It requires regular watering and fertilizing, at least weekly mowing, and can be prone to a variety of insect and disease problems. It can also form thick thatch layers unless properly maintained by aerating regularly.

Perennial Ryegrass is often mixed with Bluegrass. The turf is identical to Bluegrass, and it can impart better salt and traffic tolerance to your lawn. It also germinates very quickly, helping to stabilize the seedbed until the lawn is established. It can be used alone as a lawn grass, but it requires more maintenance (fertilizer especially) than Bluegrass. Generally best used in combination with Bluegrass, Ryegrass is a bunch type grass that generally does not form thick thatch layers.

Turf Type Tall Fescues have also gained in popularity in recent years. Newer varieties will be just slightly coarser and a little lighter green than Bluegrass, but otherwise difficult to tell apart. Watering requirements are another reason to consider Tall Fescue. While they require the same amount of water as Bluegrass, their deeper root system allows for less frequent watering. However, Tall Fescues can fail to deliver expected water savings in heavy clay soils because the plants cannot develop a deep, water conserving root system due to poor aeration in the deeper levels of these heavy clays. Soil preparation can overcome this problem, but only if done to extremely deep levels (16"-20"), well beyond the reach of any rototiller. Though less prone initially to insect and disease problems, we're starting to see more of them crop up as more Fescue is planted. Tall Fescue is a bunch type grass, which is nice because it doesn't tend to invade adjacent beds the way Bluegrass does. However, if a dead spot develops (those of you with female dogs know what I'm talking about!) the grass will not fill in by itself the way Bluegrass will. You will have to reseed the area to fill it back in.

Buffalo Grass is an excellent choice where using less water is of paramount importance. It will not survive in the Grand Valley without supplemental watering, but it requires much less water than the other common types of lawn grass. Buffalo Grass is a warm season grass, greening up in mid May, and browning out in late September into October. It is a creeping type grass, grayish green in color, reminiscent of a dwarf Bermuda Grass. It looks its best if watered two to four times a month during the summer. It can be mowed as a traditional lawn, or allowed to grow to produce a short, meadow-like lawn.

Other types of grass such as Creeping Red Fescue, Alkalagrass, and Bermuda Grass may or may not be better suited to your particular situation – come in and talk to us about it.

Soil Preparation

Poor soil conditions are a leading cause of lawn failure. The only time significant changes in the lawn soil can be made is before the lawn is planted. Once the lawn is in, soil improvement can be made only gradually and with considerable cost and difficulty. Good soil preparation needs to be done whether you are seeding, sodding, or hydroseeding your lawn. A thoroughly decomposed organic material like Composted Manure, Barkmulch, Compost, or Peat Moss all work well in improving our soils. Three to four

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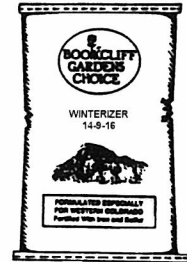
cubic yards of material should be spread out per 1000 square feet and thoroughly rototilled into the top 4" to 8" of soil. Coarser organic materials (like barkmulch) tend to break up our heavy clays better than finer materials. If your native soil is high in soluble salts, avoid using salty organic amendments like manures.

Using topsoil or sand to prepare the soil is usually not recommended. Topsoil can be used to fill in low spots or to adjust grade before normal soil preparation is done as described above. It requires a VERY LARGE amount of sand or good topsoil (a 3"-6" thick layer placed on top of the bed and mixed in) to effect anything but a negative change in our heavy clay soils, which quickly gets prohibitively expensive as well as raising the existing grade substantially.

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Once the soil has been properly prepared, level and smooth the area with a rake, removing any rocks or clods over 1" in diameter. If the soil of the seedbed is still soft after raking (If you leave footprints more than ½" deep when you walk across it), firm the soil of the seedbed by going over it with a water filled lawn roller.

If seeding your lawn, carefully broadcast the seed using a whirlybird seeder at a rate of **4 pounds of bluegrass plus 1 pound of perennial ryegrass per 1000 square feet or 13 pounds of tall fescue per 1000 square feet.** It's best to make two passes over the area, spreading half the seed on each pass. Make your passes at right angles to one another to spread the seed more evenly. An application of **Bookcliff Gardens Choice Winterizer and New Lawn Starter** should then be applied (the fertilizer can also be applied during soil preparation and tilled in.) Cover the seed by pulling a leaf rake over the seedbed twice at right angles or by applying a ¼" layer of composted manure or peat moss over the seed.



If you are sodding your lawn, use freshly cut sod. Lay it as quickly as possible, especially in hot weather. Lay the first row of sod in a straight line. Thereafter, the sod should be tightly butted together and laid in the manner of bricks in a wall, staggering the joints.

Watering

A seeded lawn will require frequent, light waterings (as many as four or five a day in hot, windy weather) until the seed has germinated. Germination may take two weeks or more, depending on weather conditions. A helpful gauge to determine when to water your newly seeded lawn is to watch the color of the seedbed as it dries. The seedbed will be dark in color when it's wet, turning lighter as it dries. When the seedbed is half dark and half light in color, give it a watering, being careful to turn the water off before it begins to run off and wash out the seedbed. After the grass is up and growing well, the frequency of watering should be reduced, but the amount applied at each watering increased.

Sod is usually laid on dry soil, and then should be thoroughly soaked as soon as it is laid. Look under a few strips of sod to make sure that the soil beneath them is thoroughly soaked. Water often enough to keep the ground moist (not soggy wet). As the sod "knits" down, you can decrease your watering frequency while you increase the amount of water applied each time until a normal watering schedule is reached.

Weeds

It is not uncommon to have a lot of weeds germinate with your grass if you seed a lawn. Don't panic! Once you start mowing your lawn regularly, most of those weeds will die out. Those few that persist can easily be controlled with weed killers or simply pulled out. Resist the temptation to spray too quickly; weed killers can hurt grass seedlings. Most broadleaf weed killers cannot be applied until the lawn has been mowed three times (about six weeks after seeding on the average). There are some tough, perennial weeds such as Bindweed and Bermuda Grass that are best controlled before starting soil preparation for your lawn. If you have these weeds, or are just not sure, bring in a sample to us a Bookcliff Gardens and we can recommend your best course of action.

Mowing

How soon you begin mowing your new lawn will depend on the growing conditions of the lawn as well as the weather. However, the first mowing shouldn't occur until the initial frequent watering schedule has slowed down some. This means that the soil of the seedbed has dried out to be firm enough to support the weight of the lawnmower and you without leaving ruts. Don't let the lawn get too tall before mowing. It's common for a germinating lawn to be "patchy" with some areas taller than others, but you should try to mow when the tallest areas are no more than 3" or 4" tall.