



EB 0924

YARDS AND GARDENS

LAWN RENOVATION

Renovation is a term used to describe corrective procedures to restore beauty to an old lawn without removing all of the sod. If all sod is removed and the soil cultivated, procedures for establishing new lawns should be followed.

Some management practices will cause turf problems to develop that require renovation to correct. These problems and a brief description of them are discussed.

Poor Mowing Practices

Proper mowing height and frequency are related to the type of grass, grass vigor, and the intended use of the area. Mow bluegrasses at 1 to 1 1/2 inches to maintain strong vigor and long life. If bentgrasses are mowed at 1 1/2 inches high, thatch and matted grass will develop quickly. If the lawn is mixed bentgrass and bluegrass, reduce the mowing height to that recommended for bentgrass—1/2 to 3/4 inch—to prevent the bentgrass from getting out of control.

The need to renovate is usually hastened by thatch accumulation. Lawns planted to mixtures of bentgrass, bluegrass, and fescues may develop heavy thatch quickly if mowed at 1 1/2 inches high, and will remain trouble free longer if mowed at 1/2 to 3/4 inch. The lower mowing height may hasten the loss of bluegrass and fescue from the stand but will help control thatch.

Contrary to some opinions, grass leaves contribute very little to thatch development. Grass clippings should be removed from lawns for aesthetic reasons and cleanliness around the home. Lawns that are mowed one or more times per week, will look better and produce fewer and shorter clippings than those mowed less frequently.

Wrong Grasses

Homeowners who prefer bentgrass lawns should plant only the noncreeping varieties. Never use creeping bentgrasses, such as Seaside or Penncross, for home

lawns because of their vigorous growth habits and thatch-forming characteristics. The average homeowner does not have the equipment or knowledge necessary to maintain these varieties. Never plant bentgrasses in eastern Washington lawns, because of thatch and disease problems.

Some exotic grasses and ground covers find their way into home lawns. Zoysia, Bermudagrass, and even Dichondra have been tried with poor success. These species are not climatically well adapted to Washington's climate and should not be used in this region.

Failure to Power Rake

Power rake annually on good lawns. Renovation may not become necessary if some of the old grass stems and surface roots (thatch) are removed by power raking. Annual removal of excess accumulation of thatch will also help maintain proper mowing height. As thatch builds up, the mower runs higher from the ground.

Excess Watering

Overwatering causes leaching of plant nutrients, replaces oxygen in the soil, and encourages surface rooting. Grass roots contribute considerably to thatch formation. Wet surface conditions can also encourage encroachment of weeds such as speedwell and buttercup.

Thorough, infrequent watering is much more desirable than light frequent applications, but is regulated by soil texture and depth. Close observation of the turf will indicate the need for water before wilting or browning occurs.

Turf Losses From Pests

When lawns have been ravaged by insects, diseases, or uncontrollable weeds, it is easier to renovate the entire lawn than to patch up the problem areas. The reasons for lawn deterioration should still be corrected to

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prevent reoccurrence before renovation procedures are carried out.

RENOVATION PROCEDURE

Renovation should be done in early fall, later winter, or early spring. The latter two periods are usually better, since favorable growing weather following renovation will enhance recovery. Avoid summer renovation because of slow recovery.

1. Adjust the mower to 3/4 inch or lower and mow thoroughly.
2. Power rake the lawn in two directions as many times as may be necessary to remove accumulated thatch. Thoroughness is important.
3. When all thatch has been removed, mow the turf at 1/2 to 3/4 inch again.
4. Grass stems and crowns may be excessively thinned by heavy raking. If this is the case, reseed the lawn at the rate of 2 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet of varieties recommended for the area. Turf renovation machines are available for overseeding. Some of these machines are small and well adapted for home lawn use. These machines cut grooves into the soil and deposit the grass seed properly to insure even and rapid establishment.

5. Before reseeding, shave off high spots and turf can be stripped from low spots and filled to make the lawn surface uniform and smooth.
6. Growth will initiate quickly from grass stems and crowns that were not removed with the power rake. Although the turf may be thin, mowing must be practiced regularly at the new adjusted mowing height.
7. Lawns having unacceptable levels of coarse weedy grasses such as velvetgrass, tall fescue, orchardgrass, or non-turf-type perennial ryegrass will respond better if all vegetation is killed with glyphosate (Roundup®) or paraquat. Chemical application and total kill should be done in mid spring or late summer. Follow steps 1-6 above for reestablishing new turf but increase seeding rates and mixtures as recommended for new lawns. Follow the same procedure for reestablishing Kentucky bluegrass lawns dominated by bentgrass and/or coarse weedy grasses. One pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet from straight nitrogen sources or from mixed fertilizers will hasten establishment and enhance quality.

If recommended fertility, watering, mowing, power raking, and pest control practices are followed, lawn beauty can be restored and maintained.

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