

# Sod Or Seed; Ground Work Pays Off

By BETTY FRANKEL  
Special Writer

To seed or to sod? That is the question for many new homeowners.

There are advantages both ways, but either method can give good results. Seeding involves more initial care but is less costly. Sod gives an instant lawn.

In either case you have to do some ground work first. The lawn you get will be only as good as the soil you grow it on. A lawn isn't just a mat that is spread over the surface. Those grass plants have roots that extend down into the soil and draw sustenance from it.

Prepare the soil thoroughly, improving the texture and fertility, and you will have a good healthy lawn that will be relatively trouble free for years to come. It will really be less work in the long run.

There are about a half dozen steps that should be followed when preparing the ground for a new lawn.

1. Check the soil and decide what kind of soil you have. Is it clay that is sticky when it is wet but becomes like concrete when it is dry? Or is it sand that is loose and porous and dries out too quickly?
- The ideal soil is a rich loam that is light, porous and spongy. It is loose enough to dig easily and roots can penetrate deeply. It is porous so the soil has air in it so, the roots can breathe. It is spongy enough to hold a good supply of moisture.
- For heavy clay or light sand, a generous amount of peat moss, compost, or other organic material worked into the soil improves the texture. It is the rich supply of organic material in loam that makes it so satisfactory.
- Although not essential, it is a good idea to have the soil tested. The Wayne County Agricultural Extension Service does this for a small fee. Tests will accurately determine if the soil is acid or alkaline, and what the fertilizer needs are.
2. Next step is grading. This is the process of contouring the land so water drains away from the house and there are no low pockets in which water can collect. All slopes should be made as gentle as possible and ridges should be rounded off.
- If you are fortunate enough to have top soil on your land, this should be pushed off and piled out of the way before the grading is done. Top soil is too valuable to waste.
3. Remove stones and debris that have been turned up. Allow the land to settle for a week or two. A thorough watering will aid the settling process and help remove air pockets. Fill in any low spots that develop.
4. Spread the top soil back over the area. Spread a layer inches thick over the area. If you have no top soil, add an extra thick layer of peat moss. Work top soil and peat moss into the underneath soil to a depth of four to six inches. This will improve the texture of the soil.
5. To improve fertility, spread fertilizer over the surface and work it into the upper few inches of soil. Unless tests have indicated the need for special fertilizers, use a balanced fertilizer, such as one with a 10-10-10 formula, or else one that has a high proportion of phosphorous. Use approximately 10 to 15 pounds per 1,000 square feet of area. Most soils in this part of the state are not acid so lime is seldom needed.
6. Finally, rake the soil, making it smooth and even with a fine powdery surface. Roll lightly or tamp the surface to make it firm and even. Now the soil is ready to be seeded or sodded.
- For most purposes, a mixture of seeds produces a better lawn. Some grass varieties thrive best in sun. Others prefer shade. With a mixture, there is a choice and the one best suited will dominate.
- Bluegrass is preferred for sunny areas. In addition to common bluegrass, there are special kinds of bluegrass such as Merion and Fyking. One of the newest bluegrasses to be developed is Adelphi. In tests throughout the country it has performed very well showing good color all summer and good disease resistance.

Another new development is perennial ryegrasses with blades as fine textured as bluegrass. They sprout quickly and look attractive. Merion, the hattan and Pennine are two reliable varieties of perennial rye.

In shaded areas, fine fescues, such as Pennington or Chewings are more satisfactory than bluegrass. Perennial ryegrass can be used in shaded areas, too.

If you sod the lawn, keep over two inches tall. This is the surface moist. This is the one time light sprinkling is recommended for lawns. Keep up the sprinkling after the seeds germinate until the lawn gets established. Then water less often but more deeply.

Begin mowing the new lawn when the grass gets over two inches tall. Early mowing will help thicken the turf.

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3. Remove stones and debris that have been turned up. Allow the land to settle for a week or two. A thorough watering will aid the settling process and help remove air pockets. Fill in any low spots that develop.

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**The Green Thumb**  
By GEORGE ABRAHAM

We're getting letters asking us what causes leaves on shade trees to turn brown and drop.

This problem is lumped together into one term - leaf scorch. It's worse on newly planted trees and in dry areas. In many areas rainfall has been scarce and trees not taking up sufficient water develop leaf scorch.

Scorch develops when water is lost from the leaves faster than it can be replaced. As a result, the cells die and the leaves partially or completely dry up. Weather plays an important part in leaf scorch.

In some areas where there has been lots of rain, you are apt to get late summer leaf scorch. The reason: Roots could not develop because of the excessive moisture in the soil, or existing roots were killed. As a result some plants were not equipped to face hot, dry weather. Their first response to it is leaf scorch.

Most often, scorch is a result of drought conditions, but overwatering can also bring about the same symptoms. Girdling roots may also cause scorch. These are roots that lie at the base of the trunk, and as both the root and trunk increase in size, they press against each other until the root cuts off the flow of sap up the trunk.

The girdling roots act like a boa constrictor, choking the tree. If you see girdling roots at the base, take a chisel and cut it.

Best way to help a tree overcome scorch and other problems is to feed and water the tree to build up vigor. If water is scarce, don't hesitate to use laundry or bath water around your ornamentals.

In September, if there is little rain and temperatures are quite high, you will need all the water you can get for your trees and shrubs. Fall feeding improves plant vigor for better growth for next season.

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**SALT FOR ASPARAGUS:** Is salt helpful in keeping down weeds in the asparagus bed? Many oldtimers still use salt in the asparagus bed, but we doubt if it does any good. Tests show that this old idea has been pretty much discredited. I hope some of our readers will write and tell us if they use salt to kill weeds.

**GREEN THUMB CLINIC:** "We have lots of white fly on our house plants and garden vegetables. Is there a control?"

Answer: Not an easy one. There's a parasite known as Encarsia which is effective and you can purchase it from certain firms which rear it. In some areas there's a natural infestation of the parasite, and the "black" white fly you may see on leaves are parasitized.

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Classes begin Sept. 10 and students may register in the classroom from 6:15-7 p.m. prior to the first class meeting.

Registration and payment of the \$80 fee must be completed by the end of the week in which the second session is held.

Classes run for 11 weeks from 7 to 10 p.m.

Courses are available in Southfield High School, Building A, Lahser and 10 Mile Rd.; in Crestwood High School, Dearborn Heights, 1501 Beech-Daly; in the Henry Ford Centennial Library, 16301 Michigan Ave., Dearborn; the Fackham Educational Memorial, 60 Farnsworth at Woodward, Detroit; and in Room 140 of the Graduate School of Business Administration at the U-M in Ann Arbor.

For further information contact the Real Estate Program, University of Michigan Extension Service, 412 Maynard, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48104 or the Extension Service Regional Center, 4901 Evergreen, Dearborn, 48128.

Students may register in advance for the Crestwood Center at the office of the Wayne County Board of Realtors, 11677 Beech-Daly, Redford Township.

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