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Starting a New Lawn from Seed

TIMING

The best time to plant grass seed for home lawns is when nighttime low temperatures are consistently in the mid-40s (°F) or warmer and the daytime highs are below 85–90°F. Avoid planting in the hottest part of summer. In many Wyoming locations, May through June or August through early September are good times. Spring plantings provide an entire growing season for the lawn to establish. Late summer and early fall plantings may be successful in some years, but in other years may not provide enough time for the new lawn to establish before cold weather arrives.

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW FOR BEST RESULTS.

1. CLEAR EXISTING VEGETATION.

In order to successfully establish a new lawn from seed, first create a seedbed for planting. A variety of methods can be used, but in all cases, the goal is to expose bare ground by clearing all existing living and dead vegetation. Existing vegetation can be dug up, smothered using tarps or cardboard, or killed with herbicides. You can also use a sod cutter to remove existing grasses and weeds and create a relatively flat surface. Note: Do not use preemergent herbicides for weed control prior to seeding a new lawn.

2. CREATE A SEEDBED FOR PLANTING GRASS SEED.

Once the ground is bare, till the top 2–3 inches of soil to create a seedbed for planting. Grass seed is planted right on the surface, so deep tillage is not necessary. Once the ground is tilled, use a garden rake to grade the soil and create a smooth surface with a gentle slope to drain water away from the house. This is also a good opportunity to address any drainage issues, low spots, or other grading needs. The soil surface should be loose and free from large dirt clods, rocks, and other debris. If walking on the area leaves footprints deeper than 1 inch, use a roller to firm the soil.

3. APPLY GRASS SEED.

When environmental conditions are appropriate, apply seed at the proper rate using a drop spreader or a broadcast



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spreader. To ensure even coverage and seed distribution, spread half the seed walking back and forth in a north-south pattern and the other half of the seed walking in an east-west pattern. Make sure to slightly overlap on each pass to ensure uniform seed coverage over the entire area. Provide good seed-to-soil contact by lightly raking the seed into the top ½ inch of soil or covering with ¼ – ½ inch of compost or peat moss.

Example: Backyard measures 80 ft x 100 ft = 8,000 ft². 4 pounds of seed/1,000 ft² is recommended. 4 lbs seed/1,000 ft² X 8,000 ft² = 32 lbs seed.

WATERING A NEWLY SEEDED LAWN

Once the area is seeded, water lightly and frequently. Since the grass seed is near the soil surface, it is not necessary to water deeply until the new lawn is established. Native/drought-tolerant grasses may require less irrigation once established, but seeds and seedlings require as much water as traditional turfgrasses to germinate and establish.

When watering a newly seeded lawn, wet the top 1–2 inches of soil. Water frequently enough to prevent the soil surface from drying out between watering. One successful approach is to water for 5–10 minutes, 3–4 times a day, from the day seed is planted until the grass is 3–4 inches tall. A timer attached to a hose and sprinkler, or an automatic sprinkler system, can help provide water consistently and reliably.

Example: Set timer to run sprinklers for 10 minutes at 6:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., and 6:00 p.m. Monitor and adjust sprinkler run-time to ensure the top 1–2 inches of soil is moist after irrigating, and to prevent standing water and runoff. Increase frequency during hot temperatures or if soil surface is drying between waterings.

Don't begin mowing until the grass has grown to be at least 2 ½ inches tall.

Questions? Visit <https://bit.ly/uwe-counties> to contact a local UW Extension office.



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Issued in furtherance of extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Mandy Marney, Director, University of Wyoming Extension, College of Agriculture, Life Sciences and Natural Resources, University of Wyoming Extension, University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming 82071.

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