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Starting a New Lawn from Sod

CHOOSING THE RIGHT GRASS FOR YOUR YARD

Sod is living grass leaves, stems, and roots, along with a thin layer of soil. Note that choosing to install sod rather than starting a lawn from seed does limit the grass options available. Kentucky bluegrass is commonly available as sod and may be the only option in some areas. Rhizomatous tall fescue and buffalograss (for lower elevations) may be available as sod in some areas. Fine fescues, tall fescue, blue grama, and streambank wheatgrass may not be available in this form.

TIMING OF PLANTING

Sod can be successfully planted spring through fall. Avoid planting when the ground is frozen.

CLEAR EXISTING VEGETATION

In order to successfully establish a new lawn from sod, first prepare the planting area by clearing all existing vegetation. 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 that killing off vegetation by smothering can take considerably more time than some of the other methods listed here.

PREPARE THE SOIL FOR PLANTING SOD

Once the ground is bare, till the top 2–3 inches of soil. Loosened soil will allow roots from the sod to grow easily into the soil. Compacted soils will inhibit root penetration and delay establishment. 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 prepared area leaves footprints deeper than 1 inch, use a roller to firm the soil.





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INSTALLING SOD

Before ordering or having sod delivered, make sure the site preparation is complete and you are ready to install the sod as soon as it arrives. Avoid leaving sod on a pallet in the hot sun for long periods of time.

Starting along one edge of the lawn, begin unrolling and laying sod pieces in straight lines, ensuring that the pieces lie flat and fit close together with no gaps between pieces. Gaps between pieces create a place for weeds to invade and may cause the edge of the sod to dry out. Stagger pieces in adjacent rows so that the seams do not line up. Continue adding rows of sod to completely fill the lawn area. Use a shovel or garden knife to cut sod into shapes that fit around sidewalks, flower beds, etc.

WATERING NEWLY SODDED LAWNS

Once the sod is installed, water immediately. To apply the correct amount of water, determine the amount of time it takes your sprinklers to wet the sod completely and wet the soil surface below the new sod. Set a timer when you turn the sprinkler on and periodically check by lifting the corner of a sod piece to see if the soil below is wet. Water 2–3 times per day for the determined amount of time, watering frequently enough to prevent drying between waterings. Be careful walking on newly installed sod when monitoring moisture levels and moving sprinklers.

Mow for the first time when grass is 5–6 inches tall, and then start watering more deeply and less frequently.

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

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