

Bluestem Breezes
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Fall Lawn Seeding

I'm not yet done with summer. So, don't get any ideas that I'm encouraging the onset of fall's arrival! You see, I still want more produce from my garden. And, I don't want to lose the colors of my flower beds or the wildflowers amidst the pastures just yet

Regardless of my denial that fall is just around the corner, it really is time to make plans if you intend to seed your lawn this fall. Please read on for fall lawn seeding tips from K-State Specialist Ward Upham:

The keys to successful lawn seeding are proper rates, even dispersal, good seed to soil contact, and proper watering. Evenness is best achieved by carefully calibrating the seeder or by adjusting the seeder to a low setting and making several passes to ensure even distribution. Seeding a little on the heavy side with close overlapping is better than missing areas altogether, especially for the bunch-type tall fescue, which does not spread. Multiple seeder passes in opposite directions should help avoid this problem.

A more serious error in seeding is using the improper rate. For tall fescue, aim for 6 to 8 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet for new areas and about half as much for overseeding or seeding areas in the shade. Using too much seed results in a lawn more prone to disease and damage from stress. The best way to avoid such a mistake is to determine the square footage of the yard first, and then calculate the amount of seed. Using too little seed can also be detrimental and result in clumpy turf that is not as visually pleasing.

Establishing good seed to soil contact is essential for good germination rates. Slit seeders achieve good contact at the time of seeding by dropping seed directly behind the blade that slices a furrow into the soil. Packing wheels then follow to close the furrow. The same result can be accomplished by using a verticut before broadcasting the seed, and then verticutting a second time.

Core aerators can also be used to seed grass. Go over an area at least three times in different directions, and then broadcast the seed. Germination will occur in the aeration holes. Because those holes stay moister than a traditional seedbed, this method requires less watering. If seeding worked soil, use light hand raking to mix the seed into the soil. A leaf rake often works better than a garden rake because it mixes seed more shallowly.

Water newly planted areas lightly, but often. Keep soil constantly moist but not waterlogged. During hot days, a new lawn may need to be watered three times a day. If watered less, germination will be slowed. Cool, calm days may require watering only every couple of days. As the grass plants come up, gradually decrease watering to once a week if there is no rain. Let the plants tell you when to water. If you can push the blades down and they don't spring back up quickly, the lawn needs water.

Once seed sprouts, try to minimize how much traffic (foot, mower, dog, etc.) seeded areas receive until the seedlings are a little more robust and ready to be mowed. Begin mowing once seedlings reach 3 to 4 inches tall.

For more information visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.