



UNIVERSITY *of* CALIFORNIA

# Agriculture & Natural Resources

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION • YOLO COUNTY

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## PLANTING A HOME LAWN WITH SEED OR SOD

In most of California it is possible to establish a new lawn at any time of the year, although September to October and March to April are the best months. The grasses commonly used for lawns can tolerate a wide variety of soil types and conditions, so it is not difficult to establish new lawns except in soils with excess salts.

### STEPS TO ESTABLISH A LAWN

**Remove Buried Foreign Material.** Remove all materials, such as cement, plaster, wood, or other construction wastes, from the lawn area. This foreign material is often buried below the soil surface and can cause serious problems in the home landscape.

**Slope of the Soil Surface.** It is important to grade the soil so that it slopes away from the house and so there are no low areas to collect surface drainage from excess water. Give careful attention to the slope of the soil surface at this time to prevent future problems due to improper surface drainage. Make lawn areas relatively flat for ease of mowing and irrigating. If the slopes are steep, consider terracing and using ground covers or shrubs.

**Cultivate to Relieve Compaction.** Alleviate compaction of the surface soil by cultivating before preparing the soil for planting. This is particularly necessary around new homes where the soil has been compacted during construction. You can correct this compaction by spading or rototilling. If the soil has not been compacted, deep cultivation is not necessary, but you should use a rake to loosen the surface soil to a depth of 1 to 2 inches.

**Establish an Irrigation System.** Consider the advantages of an underground sprinkler irrigation system before establishing the lawn. A well-designed and properly installed system can save time and provide better irrigation. Be sure to place the sprinkler irrigation lines deep enough, i.e. well below any possible future cultivation. Carefully backfill trenches and settle the soil to avoid an uneven soil grade.

**Smooth and Settle the Surface.** Rake the surface smooth, and remove rocks. Break up all soil clods or remove them so that the surface is relatively free of all soil aggregates larger than 1/2 inch. While raking, try to smooth the surface to fill low areas. A wooden drag, about 5 feet across, is useful for smoothing the surface. Make a slow, deep irrigation before final surface grading if extensive cultivation was necessary to properly settle the soil. The areas to be seeded should be about level with the sidewalk and those to be sodded should be about 1/2 inch lower.

**Fertilization and Final Seedbed Preparation.** Evenly apply a fertilizer that contains nitrogen and phosphorus. The percentages of nitrogen (N) and phosphorus ( $P_2O_5$ ) are shown by the first and second numbers in the parentheses after the fertilizer name. You can use 20 pounds of single super-phosphate (0-20-0) and 10 pounds of ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) fertilizers per 1,000 square feet, or any other fertilizer mix that gives approximately these same amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus. Twelve pounds of ammonium phosphate (16-20-0) per 1,000 square feet is also an excellent pre-plant fertilizer for new lawns. To improve uniformity of coverage, divide the fertilizer in half and apply it in two directions at right angles to each other. Rake the fertilizer into the soil so that a thin (1/4 to 1/2 inch) layer of loose soil is on the surface and the area is ready for seeding or sodding.



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**Seeding.** Uniformly distribute seed. You can best do this with a broadcast seeder or a fertilizer spreader. Set the seeding rate for half the rate desired and seed in two directions, at right angles to each other. Lightly rake the soil to cover the seed to a depth of 1/16 to 1/8 inch.

**Watering.** Light but frequent watering may be required for at least 1 month to ensure good germination and establishment of the new lawn. The key to good germination is to keep the soil moist, but not wet. Applying too much moisture can lead to early disease problems.

**Sodding.** Lay sod as soon as it arrives, since even a few hours in the sun can damage it. Moisten the soil and start laying the sod in a brick-like fashion. Butt ends together, but do not overlap them. Professionals lay sod by working from the sodded area to the open soil. Place a plywood sheet over the in-place sod to facilitate laying and to reduce damage to the sod.

Roll to firm the sod in place and water thoroughly within 30 minutes after placement. It may be necessary to irrigate every day for the first 10 days, and every second or third day until the new roots are well established in the parent soil. Keep the sod and the parent soil moist, but not wet, at all times during the establishment period, usually 2 to 4 weeks.

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