



Soil Preparation

Starting a new lawn, just like any other landscaping or gardening project, starts with proper preparation. Indeed, preparing the soil prior to seeding not only yields better results, but it helps make the most of your time and money.

Prior to adding fertilizer or other amendments, consider testing the pH and nutrient levels of your soil. Soil test kits can be purchased from your local hardware or home improvement store and usually cost between \$3 and \$20, depending on which type of test you choose.

Once the nature of the soil is defined, the pH and nutrient levels can be adjusted to make the soil as fertile as possible. Grass grows best at a pH level of between 6.5 and 7.5. Anything below 6.0 is considered acidic while anything more than 7.5 is alkaline. If your soil isn't within the ideal pH level, there are simple ways to achieve the "goldilocks" soil condition. For mildly alkaline soil (7.5 to 8.0), spreading a little peat moss should help correct the pH level. For very alkaline soils (more than 8.0), which are common in warm, dry climates, spread sulfur. To increase the fertility of acidic soils, spread lime. Always follow package directions for appropriate application rates.

The soil test will also tell you if your soil is lacking in certain nutrients, like phosphorus, nitrogen and potassium. There are several ways to supplement these nutrients and achieve the best possible growing conditions, such as adding combination chemical or organic fertilizers (N-P-K or Nitrogen-Phosphorous-Potassium). If your soil is deficient in a single nutrient, it's possible to purchase the nutrients separately.

Using a push or tow-behind broadcast spreader, spread the needed amendments onto tilled, loose soil. Keep in mind that you shouldn't mix sulfur, lime or fertilizer all together in the spreader. They should be spread over your soil separately and at the application rate specified by the material's manufacturer. After you've added the necessary amendments to the soil, use a metal garden rake to work them into the top inch of soil.

Once the soil is prepped, you're ready to start seeding! Preparation is perhaps the most time-consuming portion of starting a new lawn, but it's also the most important.