

I Fought the Lawn and the Lawn Won!

The dust is beginning to settle, the “whirring” of the lawnmower engines has quieted, the mist of the sprinklers is in the air and new grass blades are emerging through your scalped Bermuda ... you made it through another overseeding season.

Overseeding with winter ryegrass will provide you with a green, lush lawn for the winter months, which is especially important for landscapes that are predominantly turf. But don't forget that overseeded turfs have different management requirements than those that are allowed to go dormant for the winter.

Without an aggressive, well-timed management program, overseeding can be very stressful on a Bermuda lawn. For example, if Bermuda is scalped too early in the fall, you will deprive it of good food storage to the roots. This will slow green-up the next spring. If you cut back on water too severely in the spring during the transition back to Bermuda, it will injure newly developing roots.

When you consider the experience and skill required to be successful at turf management, as well as all of the other practices involved with keeping turf healthy (proper mowing, watering, aerating, dethatching and weeding), don't you wonder what the cost really is to have that lush lawn?

ENVIRONMENTAL COSTS

When you look at cost, you'll find there's much more to it than your maintenance bill. Don't forget the environmental expenses, too. These include:

- Dump fees for all of the clippings. The majority goes to a landfill.
- High water bills. Turf uses 60 percent more water per square foot than a low water use landscape.
- Excessive water usage. Turf is often watered 200 to 500 percent more than it needs.
- Higher sewer fees if you don't have a separate landscape water meter.

Additionally, if your landscape is all turf, with no trees and shrubs against buildings, you're spending more on indoor energy costs.

If you feel you absolutely have to overseed, here are some tips to help you be more environmentally friendly:

- Overseed selectively. Only overseed for functional use in the areas that matter most.
- Don't seed too early. Seed mid-October to mid-November for best results. When you seed too early, it is stressful on both the Bermuda and rye grass. Additionally, temperatures over 90° F cause more disease problems for the rye grass.
- Recycle your grass clippings. If you mow frequently and do not overwater or overfertilize, you probably do not need to bag your clippings. Recycling short clippings back onto the lawn helps return nutrients and reduces evaporation.
- Water efficiently. Pick up the “Landscape Watering By the Numbers” guide from your city Water Conservation office. Water only as much as your grass needs. Make sure your irrigation system is functioning properly. Watering the sidewalks is a nuisance, and can sometimes be dangerous. It also is a waste of water.

- Consider reducing the size of your lawn by planting low-water-use and low maintenance plants around the edges of your property or in odd-shaped areas.

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