

Lawn Establishment



HGA-00036



An attractive, healthy, and vigorously growing lawn does not happen by itself. It is the result of planning, knowledge of adaptable grass varieties and existing growing conditions, and the hard work necessary to bring it all together.

The first step that may be required is removal of existing vegetation and establishment of the necessary grades. Trees and brush may be completely or selectively removed. Leaving as many native trees as possible is a good idea because of their adaptability to the growing site and compatibility with the surrounding natural landscape. Excessive removal of topsoil is usually not necessary. It is less costly to utilize the existing topsoil or mix it with other components to develop a suitable growth medium rather than remove it completely and replace it with "topsoil." When shaping or grading the planned lawn area do not establish grades in excess of 20% and do not slope toward the house.

The next step involves removing sticks, stones and other debris which would cause problems with mowing or use of the lawn. Hand picking and raking are the most common means of accomplishing this.

A soil test should be taken after all soil is in place and before any lime or fertilizer is added. A representative sample should include at least 10 subsamples taken randomly throughout the area. They should be taken to a 6 inch depth. A soil test packet can be obtained from your District Extension Office. The results of this test will show the nutrient levels for the three major plant nutrients; nitrogen, phosphorous, and

potassium, as well as the pH or acidity of the soil. Written recommendations based on this analysis will state the analysis and amount of fertilizer needed and the lime needed to correct for soil acidity.

Recommended amounts of fertilizer and lime should be mixed into the soil. Lime should be mixed into the top 4 to 6 inches of soil in advance of seeding (perhaps even the preceding fall) since pH correction may take several weeks. Prior to seeding, the fertilizer should be raked or tilled into the soil. This will help to provide a continuous supply of nutrients for the developing grass seedlings.

Before you obtain any grass seed and scatter it over the soil surface, obtain information on which grasses are the most adaptable to your area. A good lawn seed mixture should have a number of varieties included to insure that the lawn will maintain itself over a wide range of conditions.

Kentucky bluegrass includes many named varieties. Some that are adaptable to Alaska conditions are Park, Merion, Nugget, Fylking, and Common bluegrass.

Red fescue is another grass species that includes varieties adaptable for Alaska lawns, such as Arctared, Boreal, and Pennlawn. Red fescue is better adapted to shady areas than most bluegrass varieties.

Grass seed can be scattered by hand or with a mechanical spreader. Seed should be evenly distributed. A seeding rate of 3.5 to 4.0 lb per

1,000 sq ft is recommended when using a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass and red fescue. The seed should be in close contact with moist soil particles to insure good germination. This can be accomplished by rolling or covering the seed with no more than .25 inches of soil.

Annual ryegrass can be very useful as a nurse crop. When used as a component of a mix, it germinates quickly and holds the soil in place allowing the other grass to germinate and become established. Because of its fast germination and growth it is a strong competitor and should not be a major component of a lawn seed mix.

Mulching with straw, burlap or clear plastic can help maintain surface moisture during the critical germination period. If clear plastic is used, it must be removed immediately after the seedlings emerge to prevent burning. After grass can be seen emerging from the soil surface, the mulch must be removed to allow access to sunlight.

Establishing a lawn in Alaska can be a great challenge. By selecting the best grass varieties to meet the demands of your site, properly preparing a fertile seedbed, and performing the necessary work, you can have a lawn that will make you proud.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOME TURFGRASSES IN ALASKA

Common Name Variety	Establishment Rate			Winter Hardiness		Shade Tolerance		Drought Resistance			Spring Green-up Rate		
	Fast	Med	Slow	Good	Poor	Good	Poor	Good	Med	Poor	Fast	Med	Slow
Kentucky Bluegrass													
Common			•	•			•		•		•		
Fylking			•		•		•		•			•	
Merion			•	•			•		•			•	
Nugget			•	•			•	•				•	
Park		•		•			•		•		•		
Red Fescue													
Arctared	•			•			•		•		•		
Boreal	•			•			•		•				•
Common		•			•		•		•			•	
Pennlawn		•			•		•		•			•	
Annual Ryegrass* <i>(Lolium</i>													
	•	(very fast)			•		•				•		

*Useful on erodible sites where rapid establishment is necessary.

Note: The inclusion or exclusion of names on this list does not constitute endorsement or lack thereof by ACE.