



BLOSSOM Organic Garden Store

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Organic Growing Supplies for the Maritime Northwest

Gardening Information Leaflet No.6

\$5.00

“DOING IT RIGHT” LAWN RENOVATION PROCEDURES THE MINERAL-AUGMENTED ORGANIC WAY *The Only Way to Grow!*

These are the recommended steps and sequence for renovating a lawn without tilling and mixing of the topsoil and any existing grass. This procedure assumes there is not a major weed infestation that would require use of an herbicide. The best times to renovate a lawn are fall and early spring(after February).

1 The first step is to Mow the grass to the lowest possible setting. This put stress on the old grasses and reduces interference with subsequent preparation steps and competition with the emergence of the new grass varieties (which are likely to be different species or varieties than previously planted). Unless overly thick, the grass clippings can be left in place. The vigor of new, quality seed, combined with appropriate fertilization, will result in dominance of the new grasses over the old ones.

***NOTE:** When everything is working right in the lawn ecosystem (proper fertilization, aeration, organic matter, water, etc.) clippings and thatch are rapidly eaten up by earthworms and microbes.

#2 Dethatching is required in cases where a layer of thatch has built up above the soil greater than 1/2 in. deep. This thatch has to be raked up and removed, but can be composted and returned to the lawn (after thorough decomposition) as part of annual topdressing to slowly build up organic matter and topsoil depth without smothering the lawn grasses. Dethatching machines can be rented for this purpose. Dethatching also serves to scratch up the soil and create bare spots for seeds to land on and have a better chance of rooting.

***NOTE:** Dethatching is especially helpful for removal of moss build up, which is discussed below.

#3 Core aeration (using a rented aerator machine) is next. This drills holes that allow penetration of air, water, fertilizer and lime below existing grass root level. The core plugs left on the surface could be raked off, however it is best to break them up with a rake after applying fertilizers, ect. To the surface as described below.

#4 Compost Tea and /or Soluble Fertilizer Spraying is an optional step that either supplies microbes or stimulates existing soil microbes to process the added fertilizers and compost thereby making them more quickly and completely available for the developing grasses. They also supply many micronutrients, which serve as a health tonic when applied monthly throughout growing season (March through September).

#5 Apply Organic Lawn Food and Agricultural Lime evenly over the entire lawn area according to rates specified on the bags or according to planned landscaping rates. Where the amounts of fertilizer and lime (usually calcitic and not dolomitic) are approximately equal, it may be more convenient to first mix them in a wheelbarrow and scoop into a drop spreader as needed. We rent spreaders.

***NOTE:** A second application of balanced organic lawn fertilizer will be needed in six months.

#6 Apply Organic Compost at 1/8 in. to 1/4 in. depth over the entire lawn area to supply biologically active organic matter and some nutrients. Alternatively, the compost could be applied after sowing the grass seed to cover and protect the seeds from birds and prevent freezing or drying out at the critical germination stage. However, because of the need to break up the aeration cores and accomplish all the mixing and spreading with one raking, this step can be taken ahead of sowing. The resulting thin layer of compost, ect. Creates a reasonably good germination bed.

***NOTE:** A 3 cubic foot bag of compost covers 288 square feet (about 17ft X17ft) to a depth of 1/8 inch.

#7 Rake all the amendments and aeration cores with a stiff-tined rake (or landscaping rake) vigorously enough to break up the cores and loosely refill the aeration holes with the intermixed fertilizers and compost. This mixture serves to enrich the soil, fire up the microlife and earthworm and also loosens the soil over time.

#8 Sow Seed of the recommended varieties for the situation (sunny, shady, playground, ect.) at a rate of 4 to 6 lbs. per 1000 square feet (for over seeding). Use a hand-held seeder or a drop spreader to get even coverage. In some cases seeds can be mixed in with fertilizers or topdressing mixtures and put into a drop spreader for all together application in one pass.

***NOTE:** In heavily shaded areas where grass does poorly, it may be best to plant woody ground covers adapted to shade.

#9 Rake the surface with a leaf-type lawn rake to work seeds down into the time organic matter covering for better “seed to soil contact” and protection. This also serves to reduce moisture loss and eliminates the need to apply a protective peat moss layer that is often recommended.

#10 Roll the entire area with a lawn roller to work seeds to soil contact and improve germination and seedling survival prospects. This step is somewhat optional. Water-fill type rollers can be rented for this job which takes very little time and may yield a thicker and more level lawn.

#11 Water the entire lawn area and put up stakes and rope off the area to prevent entry except to move sprinklers where and when needed. Once the grass is up, it must be carefully monitored and watered as much as two or three times daily in sunny, warm weather. The grass is at its most vulnerable stage shortly after germination until two inches high.

#12 Stay off the lawn for approximately one month while the seedlings are getting sufficiently rooted and established. Kids, dogs, visitors, ect. Have to be controlled if all the time and expense invested is not to be wasted. Do not walk on frosted or frozen grass. If moles should invade, see us for mole control advise or service.

#13 Mow the grass when it has reached 3in. to 4 in. height. Remove the top inch and do not go lower than 2 inches or the grass could be weakened or killed. Grass clippings can be left to decompose and partially fertilize lawns without contributing to possible thatch build-up.

#14 Maintenance Proper fertilization and liming frequency and quantities at correct amounts should prevent thatch build up and soil compaction as well as reduce prospects for disease and pest problems. Correct mowing and watering throughout the growing season are also important to maintaining good health and appearance of a lawn.

#15 Moss Control will usually be unnecessary for lawns that are properly installed and maintained by organic methods, provided there is adequate depth of good topsoil and good drainage. In general, all the steps described above to foster grass growth work against moss growth. There is no selective, organic moss killer or weed and feed material. Iron sulfate can be spread or sprayed on moss to kill, but this is temporary measure and turns the lawn black for a period. The moss usually returns anyway until underlying causes are corrected. The single most effective measure (without using poisons) is dethatching (which kills or greatly weakens moss strands) followed by over seeding. Beyond that, proper lawn maintenance and organic care measures that fosters grass growth are the best offense for moss control. The same is true for weed control in lawns.