

## West Virginia University

### HOW TO ESTABLISH A LAWN

Because an attractive lawn is an asset to any home, each year homeowners invest much money and time to establish and maintain turf. Both these expenses can be minimized by careful advance planning.

The success or failure of a lawn depends greatly on the selection of the right grass for the lawn; use of quality seed or sod; careful preparation of the soil; proper planting procedures and a well executed maintenance program. Careful attention to these important factors will eliminate or greatly reduce many lawn problems.

#### LAWN AREAS

The lawn area should complement the residence and give the home its proper setting and scale. Large lawns can overpower small homes and too small a lawn can make the home overpower the site. Unfortunately, there is no set rule for the size of a lawn because of the many factors involved. Lawns have become a status symbol—the larger the lawn the higher the status. In other cases, lawns are established simply because the land is available, which doesn't necessarily enhance the home. Besides, homeowners often tire of maintaining large lawns, forgetting that it's much better to have a well maintained small lawn than acres of unattractive, ill-kept turf.

#### SELECTING THE PROPER GRASS

One of the first decisions to be made is what species and variety of grass will be planted. Contrary to general opinion, all grasses do not perform the same. Some varieties are adapted to growing in shady areas, while others do well only in full sun. Some grasses do best in moist soils, others in dry, sandy ones.

Before the grass variety can be selected, the planter has to determine the use of the lawn and the maintenance it will receive. For instance, with average maintenance, bluegrasses withstand average wear and recover quickly from damage. Bentgrasses on the other hand will take some abuse but require constant attention.

It is advisable to obtain grass seed from reputable dealers. If you plan to sow only one species be sure to purchase certified seed. If you use a mixture, its quality can be determined by the analysis printed on the container. High-quality mixtures will not contain "nurse grasses" such as ryegrass or clover.

Do not be misled by flashy advertisements and bargain prices. The cost of seed is relatively minor when compared to the total cost of lawn construction. Cheap mixtures generally contain a high percentage of undesirable grasses or the percent of germination is very low due to poor quality seed. Read the label carefully when purchasing ready prepared mixtures. The law requires that all mixtures be labeled as to content.

### SOIL PREPARATION

#### SUBSOIL

A good lawn begins with a well-conditioned subsoil. First, the top 4 to 6 inches of soil should be removed and stockpiled. Where possible, do this before construction of the home begins. If the home has been built, remove all debris before stockpiling the top soil.

Next, loosen the subsoil to a depth of 6 inches and remove all debris, such as rocks, cans, stumps, etc. Have the subsoil tested by the WVU Soil Testing Lab using instructions and the mailer available from your local County Extension Agent. If needed, add lime and superphosphate and cultivate into the