



SPRUCE UP AND OVER-SEED YOUR LAWN

STARNOTE 830
June 2009

What to do and when to do it

Is your lawn looking a bit thin and spotty? Do you have grass that goes completely brown in winter? Do you have bare spots? How do you spruce up your lawn to correct these conditions? The following information will help you fix a problem lawn. Before we begin, it's important to know what kind of grass you have and how it's affected by our tough desert weather.

GRASSES MOST COMMONLY GROWN IN OUR CLIMATE. The overwhelming majority of lawns planted with seed or sod are fescue or bermuda. Blue grass and ryegrass are planted to a lesser extent. For information and descriptions of seed types, refer to *StarNote 800, "Planting a New Lawn From Seed."* Consider these factors before making a choice:

Fescue and Blue Grass are cool-season grasses. Exposure to our severe summer heat and alkaline soil conditions causes them to thin out over time. Periodic re-seeding, usually every 2-3 years, keeps your lawn looking its best. These grasses are clumping varieties and do not spread, therefore, a thin lawn will not fill in or thicken with aeration or fertilization. While blue grass makes a beautiful lawn, it is much more sensitive to our summer heat than fescue and takes much more work to keep it looking good. If you decide to try it, limit use to eastern and northern exposures. Fescue and blue grass can usually be kept green year-round with a proper fertilization program.

Bermuda is a warm season grass. It thrives in our summer heat but goes completely dormant in winter, resulting in a uniform brown color. Bermuda is a creeping grass that effectively repairs itself in thin areas and small to medium bare spots. It's a favorite of pet owners for that reason. It also takes much more heavy foot traffic than fescue or blue grass varieties. Most bermuda seed is of the common variety. Hybrid bermudas are denser, lower-growing varieties, very few varieties produce any viable seed. Over-seeding with annual (winter) ryegrass or perennial rye keeps a bermuda lawn green in winter.

Perennial Ryegrass is used to over-seed bermuda lawns and golf courses for rich green color during the winter. It can also provide a quick spruce up in fall and winter for homes with fescue lawns. It has finer blades and is more heat tolerant than annual (winter) ryegrass, but eventually succumbs to our severe summer heat. Research is ongoing to develop varieties that can be grown here year-round.

Annual (Winter) Ryegrass is used to over-seed bermuda lawns for quick, inexpensive green color in winter. It has thicker blades than the perennial varieties and uses more water, but provides good results. It dies in the heat of late spring when bermuda emerges from dormancy.

RE-SEEDING/OVER-SEEDING YOUR EXISTING FESCUE LAWN. Fall (September & October) is the best time for over-seeding though mid-spring is also a good time. Before applying any seed, remove thatch buildup with a hand or power rake and aerate the entire lawn. If not removed periodically (about every 2 years) thatch buildup will restrict the movement of water and fertilizer to grass roots. This causes in the very same problems you are trying to avoid--thin grass, bare spots and an overall "tired" appearance. You can rent a power rake or aerator from a commercial equipment rental agency, or get a changeable power rake attachment or foot-aerator from your favorite Star Nursery location. When re-seeding a fescue lawn, use the following checklist:

- Mow the lawn (about 1½ inches is a good height).
- De-thatch (power or hand rake) and aerate. Though this process is best when done during late spring, thatch should be removed prior to over-seeding for optimum germination.
- Broadcast *Dr. Q's® Sod & Seed Starter* (6-10-10) fertilizer per bag instructions.
- Broadcast seed at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet. Many kinds of fescue seed are available. We recommend *Emerald Carpet™*, a dwarf fescue variety that is finer-bladed, slower growing, more water efficient and needs less mowing than most other fescues.
- Cover the lawn with *Steer Manure* or *Top Dressing* at the rate of 125 square feet per bag.
- Water 3 minutes, 4 times per day, for fourteen days or until grass is established.
(6 am, 10 am, 1 pm & 5 pm)
- Follow the Southern Nevada Water Authority *Lawn Watering Guide* for best results when lawn is established.

OVER-SEEDING A BERMUDA LAWN. Preparation is much the same as that for a fescue lawn.

- Mow lawn very short (about 1 inch or less).
- De-thatch (power or hand rake) and aerate. Though this process is best when done during the summer, thatch should be removed prior to over-seeding for optimum germination.
- Broadcast *Dr. Q's® Sod & Seed Starter* (6-10-10) fertilizer per bag instructions.
- Broadcast perennial or annual ryegrass seed at the rate of 1 pound per 100-150 square feet.
- Cover the lawn with *Steer Manure* or *Top Dressing* at the rate of 125 square feet per bag.
- Water 3 minutes, 4 times per day, for fourteen days or until grass is established.
(6 am, 10 am, 1 pm & 5 pm)
- Bermuda uses less water than fescue lawns. Follow the *Lawn Care Watering Guide* for starters, but experiment by skipping one time per day or more in that schedule. You'll probably find that once a day for 8 minutes will be quite sufficient during the growing season.

HANDY TIP. If all your hard work is feeding the birds, try broadcasting and covering seed about dusk when birds are roosting. If they don't see you spread it, they won't find as much of it! For spot seeding, cover the area with burlap for the few days to shield the seed from birds.