

# Creating a Healthy Lawn Starts with the soil

## Sunlight, Air, Water and Nutrients

Creating a healthy lawn all starts with the soil. If the soil under the turf is good, you will have a healthy lawn for many years to come. For optimum growth, turf grass needs just four things to grow... **sunlight, air, water and nutrients.** Reduce any of these, or provide too much of any one, and the grass may die or simply suffer. In the right proportions, the lawn will flourish.

## Not All Soils are Ideal

Grass obtains three of these four essential factors (air, water and nutrients) from the soil, but many soils are less than ideal for growing grass. Some soils contain too much clay and may be very compacted. They are great for roads, but bad for grass because air and water aren't available to

the roots and the roots can't grow. Other soils may have too much sand; beautiful on a beach, but difficult to grow grass because water and nutrients won't stay in the root zone long enough for the plant to use. Another frequently observed problem with many soils is that its pH (the degree of acidity or alkalinity) is too high or too low for optimum grass growth.

## Getting Your Soil Tested

Getting the soil right is important. Ideally you would have the existing soil checked by a soil scientist, and he would tell you what it needs, but this is not always practical, but it is feasible. Simply Google soil laboratories and you will find one.

## 3 Ways to Prepare the Soil

Apart from getting advice from a soil scientist, there are three basic methods that can be used to prepare the soil. Choosing the correct method depends on budget and the condition of the soil to begin with.

**1.** First you must kill any existing grass or weeds with Glyphosate. Spraying once will kill most things, but if you can follow up spray a couple of months later will make sure pretty much everything is dead. Before spraying make sure the weeds and undesirable grass is healthy, it even helps to water a few times before spraying to make sure of it. Round Up works better if the weeds are growing well.

**2.** If you are lucky enough to have good soil, then simply hire a subcontractor with a tractor rotary hoe, or hire a small one from a rental company to loosen the soil bed to at least 100mm, and a maximum of 200mm. If the soil is too hard, water it well the night before. After rotary hoeing, rake out any dead foliage if necessary and level

the ground. If the soil is of a clay type, a sandy type, or relatively poor in other ways, buy some organic soil conditioner. Use at least 2 cubic metres per 100 square metres. Spread this over the soil. If it is a clay type, use Gypsum as well. Use a rotary hoe to mix this well into the ground, and then rake the ground smooth.

**3.** Hiring a skid steer to do the work is another method. If you prefer to get a contractor to do the preparation, this makes life easier.

Make sure the operator rips the existing soil well first, loosening the base. A hard compacted sub soil is the last thing a lawn needs. Then order 7 cubic metres of good quality organic soil blend per 100 square metres of ground. Make sure it has a decent amount of organics in it. Spread this with the skid steer, making sure the finish is smooth. In some areas you may need to rake smooth with the back or front of a rake

## Instant Lawns are Better

Turf is the safest and best way to install a lawn. Laying turf is really easy. Seeding only works well in places like Tasmania where cool climate turf like Fescue is used. For warm climate turf like Buffalo no seed is available, and for Couch and Kikuyu, the seed germinates very slowly, and is difficult to get a good result out of.

Simply lay one roll around the outside and then fill in the area with the turf all going one way. Patch up any gaps, roll the lawn if you can, and water in

well. On hot days water the turf in sections as you lay it. Don't fertilise till a month after the turf is laid. University research proves that turf receives no benefit from fertiliser until a month after laying. Then use a good slow release type.

For the first two weeks the lawn cannot dry out. On a hot day in summer, that may mean watering three times per day, or on a milder day, once per day. After two weeks, watering can often be reduced to every 2nd or 3rd day.