



## **ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE**

**The Garden Spot  
For week of August 31, 2009**

### **Fall is the Time for Lawn Improvement**

If you've got bare spots in your yard, or places that are just too weedy, now is the time to start thinking about renovating your lawn. A well-established turf area this fall means a better chance that it will survive next summer's heat, humidity, and potential drought. Start assessing what you need to do, and plan on starting the process in late September.

Warm days, cool nights, and fall rains favor turf establishment for cool-season grasses such as turf-type tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, or for a temporary cover, annual ryegrass. Also, fewer weed seeds germinate in the fall, which means less competition for new grass seedlings. Although soil preparation is time consuming and sometimes expensive, it is crucial. Properly preparing the soil is the first step toward having a beautiful lawn. If there is one aspect NOT to overlook, this is it.

For existing areas where a decent stand of grass is present and weeds are few, it may be acceptable to overseed the lawn with little preparation. Before seeding, mow the grass to a 3/4-inch height to allow germinating seedlings enough light to support their growth. Drop spreaders or slit seeders can be used to distribute seed over the area. Then water thoroughly, and the seeds will start to grow and fill in the turf. Slit seeders are often used by lawn care companies, but homeowners can sometimes rent them at equipment rental stores. These seeders create a groove in the soil and deposit the seed into the groove. This method insures good seed-to-soil contact, which is necessary for rapid germination and establishment. If a drop seeder or spreader is used, lightly rake the area to work the seed into the soil.

For areas with more weeds than grass, it would be wise to start from scratch. To do this, start by killing the existing vegetation with a nonselective herbicide such as the chemical glyphosate. Glyphosate will kill nearly any plants that it contacts. The entire plant, including the root system, is usually killed. Death generally occurs within days, although the visual symptoms may take a week to appear. After spraying, wait 7 to 14 days and then remove the dead material by rototilling or aerating and then raking off the debris. It's best to place the dead plant material in the compost pile. Once the soil is worked, apply the seed with a drop spreader or slit seeder, cover lightly with straw, and water well. The seed must stay moist in order to germinate so it will need to be lightly sprinkle everyday until germination occurs. A light layer of hay or straw will help keep the soil moist. After the grass seed has germinated, water deeply and no more than once a week depending on the amount rainfall. Watering this way encourages a deep root system and healthier grass.

Within a few days, you'll see tiny spouts of grass. Maintain it well and next spring you won't have those nuisance bare spots in your yard.

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