

Overseeding for Renewal of Older or Patchy Lawns

The best way to revive an older lawn is to core aerate it, overseed it and topdress it with compost. Since the holes removed from the lawn are 2-3 inches deep, the grass can start to germinate and grow up to the surface without damage from foot traffic. And by starting in the holes, they are shaded and less likely to dry out.

Greeley will issue an overseeding variance for 14 days if this procedure is followed.

Core Aeration

This is more beneficial than power raking. It helps improve the root zone by relieving soil compaction while controlling thatch accumulation. Soil compaction, in fact, is one factor that contributes to thatch buildup.

Aeration removes plugs of thatch and soil 2 to 3 inches long (the longer, the better) and deposits them on the lawn. A single aeration using a machine with 1/2-inch diameter tines removes about 10 percent of the thatch if enough passes are made to achieve an average 2-inch spacing between holes.

Disposing of the cores is a matter of personal choice. From a cultural perspective, there may be an advantage to allowing the cores to disintegrate and filter back down into the lawn. Mingling soil and thatch may hasten the natural decomposition of the thatch. The little fluffs of thatch and turf that remain can be collected and composted.

Depending on soil type, core disintegration may take a few days to several weeks. Irrigation helps wash the soil from the cores. Dragging a piece of cyclone fence or an old metal door mat can speed the process. Running over the cores with a rotary mower can be effective but can dull the blade. Many commercial companies that perform core cultivation break up the cores with a power rake. If the cores are removed from the lawn, compost them before using them as a mulch or soil amendment.¹

Seeding or Overseeding

Distribute good quality seed by hand or seeder. Broadcast the seed walking two directions over the area, to evenly apply the seed. At this point you will want to water lightly to wet the seed and soil for better germination.

Topdress with Compost

Soil on the Front Range is low in organic matter and alkaline. You do not want to add anything that will make your soil more alkaline (i.e. gypsum, wood ash, lime, or bone meal). Organic amendments increase soil organic matter content and offer many benefits. Organic matter improves soil aeration, water infiltration, and both water- and nutrient-holding capacity. Many organic amendments contain plant nutrients and act as organic fertilizers. Organic matter also is

¹ Taken from Colorado Master Gardener Factsheet *no.7.202, Lawn Care*, by T. Koski and V. Skinner

an important energy source for bacteria, fungi and earthworms that live in the soil.² Compost is the best choice for topdressing the lawn. Purchase good quality compost from a reputable landscape company. The compost should be screened and finished. Manures that are not completely composted are too high in salt and will burn your tiny seedlings.

If you are using homemade compost, you may want to screen it, to make sure the particles are small enough to fall into the aeration holes. A simple way to do this is place a screen with a hole size of about ¼-½ inch (hardware cloth is a good example) over your wheel barrow and shovel the compost in while another person shakes the screen back and forth to let the smaller particles fall through. Larger leftover particles can go into garden beds or back to the compost pile.

Spread your compost evenly over your lawn and rake any areas where the compost is too thick. Water the entire area to wet the compost and make a good place for the seed to germinate.

Watering your lawn

You will want to water lightly for 5-10 days depending on temperature and precipitation. If it is above 80 degrees water everyday. If it is above 90 degrees, you may want to water twice a day. The higher the temperature, the quicker the seed will germinate, but it will also dry out quicker. These first couple weeks are critical to getting your seedlings established. You will need to be vigilant and keep the area evenly moist, but not wet or soggy.

² Taken from Colorado Master Gardener Fact Sheet no. 7.235 Choosing a Soil Amendment, J.G. Davis and C.R. Wilson.