Turfgrass Series

How to seed a residential lawn with turfgrass

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Most of the turfgrasses on Guam are propagated vegetatively, but some such as centipede grass and common bermuda grass could be seeded as well.

Seeding Time, Rate and Depth

On Guam, seeding can take place at any time of the year but the peak of rainy season should be avoided because seed can be lost to run-off. Species suitable for Guam differ substantially in seeding rates. Bermuda grass may require 2 lbs. of seed per 1000 ft^2, whereas centipede grass may require only ½ lb. Seeding rate depends also upon germination conditions (range is printed on the seed label) and on Guam the upper range is usually optimal. Most turf-grass seeds are very small and should be planted quite shallowly, i.e., barely covered with soil. Applying seeds to the soil surface and lightly raking afterwards can produce the desired planting depth. Seeds planted too deep may not germinate, or their germination may be delayed.

Seeding Methods

The primary goal is to distribute seeds uniformly. Seeding by hand is popular on small areas such as home lawns (Figure 1). The seeds are very small, often slippery, and mostly dark in color, so they are not visible on the ground. Applying them directly can be risky because small imperfections in seeding may result in significant imperfections in coverage. The seeds should therefore be thoroughly mixed with dry, preferably white, sand. The visibility of white sand on the ground reveals any areas of non-uniformity. The percentage of sand is not important, but a proportion of 1-part seeds to 10-parts sand usually works well. Small areas such as home lawns can be seeded from a jar with holes punched in the lid. The desired amount of seed, calculated for a particular size of lawn, can be mixed with white sand. All at once or commoly in several portions, the seed-sand mix is placed in the jar, which acting like a large salt-shaker, allows for a uniform application of seeds. The white sand guides the applicator very efficiently by revealing which spots received more seeds and which received less. It is better (for seeding uniformity) to punch smaller holes in the lid and walk several times over the seeding area than dispose the entire amount of seed-sand mix too quickly.

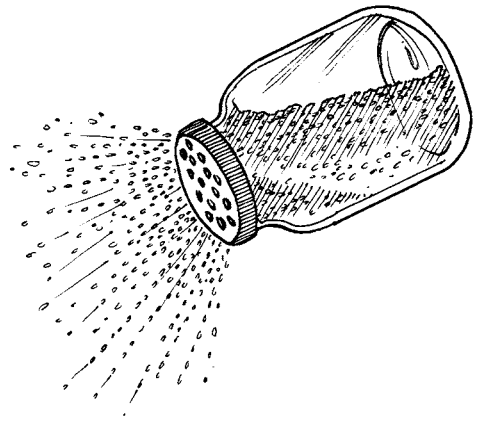

Figure 1. Home lawns can be seeded using a jar with holes punched in its lid.

Germination

Seeds need moisture to germinate, but the most critical time comes just after germination, when seedlings have begun to root but have not yet developed a root system. If adequate moisture is not available, even for several hours within this period, the entire stand may be lost. The surface must be kept moist, in the absence of rain, by light applications of water several times a day. After this critical period, which lasts for about 1-2 weeks, the grass root system develops, and water can be obtained from the underlying soil. From this time, irrigation should gradually increase in volume and decrease in frequency.

The first mowing should occur when seedlings are well anchored and 40-50 % higher than the anticipated mowing height. For example, if centipede grass turf is to be maintained at a 1 inch cutting height, seedlings should be mowed when they reach no more than 1 and ½ inch. From this point mowing should continue at standard frequency and should be guided by the same 40-50 % rule. Mowing less frequently removes too much leaf area at one time and can set the plant back severely. Shortly after the first mowing, a light application of nitrogen 0.5 lb N/1000 ft^2 may substantially speed up turf establishment.

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