

SOIL PREPARATION IS ONE KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL LAWN

Whether you are planting a new lawn or replanting parts of an old one, getting the soil ready to receive the grass seed or sod is critical to the long term success of your turf. Soil preparation is your opportunity to improve conditions that will benefit your lawn making it more sustainable and vigorous.

First, have a soil test completed. Soil test forms are available at our office or you can obtain one online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/SS/SS18700.pdf>. In brief, take 10-15 sub-samples in random spots from the upper six inches of soil across the area you want tested. Combine these sub-samples into one composite sample of about a cup of soil. Submit this in a plastic zip-

lock baggie with your sample form, and the appropriate test fee as noted, to the University of Florida Gainesville lab. Normally, you will get back a report within two weeks with the results. Our office also receives an electronic version of the report, so please feel free to call if you need any help with interpreting your soil test.

As you begin to prepare the area for a lawn, remove all of the big stuff cluttering the soil such as rocks, stumps, large roots, etc. This is also the time to kill off perennial weeds such as Bermuda grass with a non-selective herbicide such as glyphosate as per label directions. Also, if needed, get your irrigation system in place be-

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fore you plant your lawn. It should be designed and installed by an irrigation specialist so that water is delivered efficiently and uniformly.

Our sandy soils will often benefit from an addition of organic matter to increase water and nutrient-holding capacities. While organic matter will breakdown over time, this is your opportunity to add this material. A general recommendation for adding organic matter would be three to six cubic yards per 1,000 square feet. Make sure that the organic matter is either sterilized or well-composted so that weed seeds are not accidentally introduced. If you do add any organic matter prior to installing your lawn, make sure to till

this into the upper six to eight inches of soil. As you finish the grading, prepare a smooth seed bed with a rake. Make sure that soil particles are smaller than a golf ball in size – even smaller is better. Finish the area by firming the planting bed with a water ballast roller taking care not to compact the soil too much. Water the area to settle the soil and then break up any crusty surface with a rake immediately prior to planting.

Scattering some seed or flopping pieces of sod without preparing the soil first will result in minimal success. Taking the time to do a proper job of preparing your lawn planting bed will pay off with an attractive lawn.

Resources:

- Trenholm, L.E. & Shoher, A.L. (2009) *Preparing to Plant a Florida Lawn*. UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

*contact a
MASTER GARDENER
on the Plant Lifeline from 1:00pm-
4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and
Friday at 764.4340 or by email
Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com.*

*You can also visit them at
one of our many **Plant Clinics**
around the county:
<http://charlotte.ifas.ufl.edu/PlantClinics.pdf>*



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