



LAWN RENOVATION

Faced with a lawn that has deteriorated over time or has been invaded with annual and perennial weeds, the homeowner must decide what to do. Following proper methods greatly increases the likelihood of a successful renovation.

The simplest approach is to aerate compacted soil, thatch (if required) in the spring, and fertilize the turf. However, if the condition of the lawn is bad enough, more drastic measures may be required. The following three methods may be considered:

Lawn renovation with thatching and overseeding.

Lawn renovation by killing turf and weeds followed by overseeding.

Lawn renovation by killing the turf and weeds, sod removal and treating the site as a new lawn.

LAWN RENOVATION WITH THATCHING AND OVERSEEDING

This method is recommended if:

- Thatch is heavy.
- Desirable grasses have been crowded out.
- If weedy perennial grasses have invaded the area, they must be killed before renovation will be effective.
- Turf has been damaged by insects or diseases.

This method of renovation is best done in the spring, giving the turf time to recover before fall:

1. Mow the lawn at approximately 3/4 inch in height.
2. Use a power rake to remove accumulated thatch. Most attachments for lawn mowers will not do an adequate job for this type of renovation. Go over the turf in two directions.
3. Rake up debris and mow again at the same height.
4. If turf looks very thin, reseed the lawn.
 - a. Choose a grass seed best suited for the area and its use.
 - b. Reseed in perpendicular directions at 1/2 the seeding rate for your chosen seed.
5. Maintain constant surface moisture for germination of newly applied seed.
6. Remaining grass stems and crowns will soon begin to green up.

Visit our website at <https://extension.wsu.edu/spokane/master-gardener-program/home-lawn-and-garden/>
e-mail your garden questions to: mastergardener@spokanecounty.org

7. Keep turf healthy by regular fertilizing, watering and mowing. ([Lawn Care Basics](#))
 - a. Adjust lawn mower to recommended height and mow regularly even if turf is thin. An optimal height for a cool-season grass generally is about 2 1/2 inches. And at each mowing, you should only be removing about the top 1/3 of the grass blade.

LAWN RENOVATION BY KILLING TURF & WEEDS FOLLOWED BY OVERSEEDING

This method is recommended if:

- Turf is too sparse and weedy to overseed successfully.
- Turf has been invaded by weedy perennial grasses such as bentgrass or quackgrass, etc.
- Thatch is less than two inches deep.
- It is not necessary to change grade or improve the underlying soil.

This procedure works best if done during the summer and reseeding by late August or early September:

1. Do not mow. Water at least two times a week so that turf and weeds are growing vigorously and are tall enough for good non-selective herbicide coverage.
2. Before using any non-selective herbicide, always read the label carefully and closely follow the instructions. *
 - a. Warnings include wearing protective clothing and safety devices when storing, handling, and applying non-selective herbicides.
 - b. Some chemicals may not be registered in your area or may have restricted use, so beware of usage restrictions.
 - c. Be aware of your legal responsibilities as a pesticide applicator. You may be liable for injury or damage resulting from non-selective herbicide use.
3. After seven to ten days, mow the lawn as closely as possible. Remove clippings and discard.
4. If green areas remain in the lawn, treat these areas as in 1 through 4 above before proceeding.
5. Rent a renovator or power rake. Set the machine so that it barely cuts into the soil. Go over the dead turf at different angles until seed contact with the soil is possible. This method does not damage tree and shrub roots and sprinkler systems. Compost or discard plant debris.
6. Work an all-purpose plant fertilizer into the soil with a garden rake. Apply at label rates for lawns.
7. Overseed at the recommended rate for the grass seed you have chosen.
 - a. It pays to buy certified seed. Certification insures varietal purity, absence of weeds, and a high germination rate.
8. Organic matter mulches will reduce surface water evaporation and may hasten germination but must be applied uniformly and not more than 1/8-inch-thick.
9. Keep turf properly watered, fertilized and mowed. ([Lawn Care Basics](#))
 - a. Water consistently to keep the top three to four inches of soil moist. This will prevent new seedlings from drying out.
 - b. An optimal height for a cool-season grass generally is about 2 1/2 inches. And at each mowing, you should only be removing about the top 1/3 of the grass blade.

LAWN RENOVATION BY KILLING THE TURF AND WEEDS, SOD REMOVAL AND TREATING THE SITE AS A NEW LAWN

This method is recommended when:

- Turf is very sparse.
- The underlying soil must be improved.
- Thatch is too thick to remove.
- Turf is mostly bent grass and hard-to-kill perennial weeds or weedy grasses.

This process takes approximately two months:

1. Do not mow lawn. Water at least two times a week until turf and weeds are growing vigorously and are tall enough for good non-selective herbicide coverage.
2. Before using any non-selective herbicide, always read the label carefully and closely follow the instructions. *
 - a. Warnings include wearing protective clothing and safety devices when storing, handling, and applying non-selective herbicides.
 - b. Some chemicals may not be registered in your area or may have restricted use, so beware of usage restrictions.
 - c. Be aware of your legal responsibilities as a pesticide applicator. You may be liable for injury or damage resulting from non-selective herbicide use.
3. Give turf and weeds seven to ten days to die. It may take longer in cool weather.
4. Remove sod by renting a sod cutter or by cutting into strips with a half-moon layer edger.
5. Rototill or spade soil.
 - a. Try to remove any deep-rooted perennials now.
 - b. Rake out and discard coarse debris.
6. Amend soil with organic material for improved drainage if necessary.
7. After adding [soil amendments](#), prepare as for a new lawn by grading and smoothing out.

This is an important part: After rototilling, buried weed seeds will be brought to the surface and will germinate. Water as you would for a new lawn for three to four weeks. When newly emerged weeds are growing vigorously, use a second application of non-selective herbicide, repeating steps two and three. Then, if few weeds emerge, spot kill or remove by shallow hoeing.

8. At the end of seven to ten days, apply an all-purpose fertilizer at label rates for new lawns and work it into the top four to six inches of soil.
9. Sow seed at the rate for a [new lawn](#) and rake lightly, or install sod if preferred.
10. Water regularly and deeply, keeping the top two to three inches of soil moist to prevent new seedlings from drying out.
11. Keep turf properly watered, fertilized and mowed. ([Lawn Care Basics](#))
 - a. Water consistently to keep the top three to four inches of soil moist. This will prevent new seedlings from drying out.
 - b. An optimal height for a cool-season grass generally is about 2 1/2 inches. And at each mowing, you should only be removing about the top 1/3 of the grass blade.