

LOUISIANA HOME LAWN SERIES

A guide to maintaining a healthy Louisiana lawn



Sod Installation & Establishment

Sod Basics

Several turfgrass species for home lawns can be established through sod. Following the proper steps during establishment can help one avoid issues that are more difficult to manage after the turfgrass is established. Sod is a common method for establishing a turfgrass in Louisiana and can be used year-round depending on environmental conditions.

January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Turfgrass dormant		Turfgrass active growth season								Turfgrass dormant	

Site Preparation

STEP 1: Evaluate the soil characteristics, drainage pattern, and any other existing conditions (e.g., shade) that will affect turfgrass establishment and growth. This evaluation will help you determine the proper turfgrass species for the site and identify other issues that may need to be corrected before establishment.

STEP 2: Collect a soil sample and submit it for fertility analysis several weeks prior to beginning establishment. For larger areas or an area with differing soil types, more than one soil sample may be necessary. For information on how to collect a soil sample, see publication 3624-PPP.

STEP 3: Destroy any existing vegetation. Destroying vegetation can be accomplished through mechanical methods, solarization or nonselective herbicide application. The method chosen will determine the duration needed before implementing Step 4.

STEP 4: Once the existing vegetation is destroyed, till the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches and remove dead vegetation and debris. Tilling aerates the soil and can allow slight contouring of the area for better surface drainage. If adjustments in soil pH or fertility are recommended based on soil test results, then incorporate the required amendments or fertilizer.

STEP 5: Rake the area to remove any remaining debris and shape the area to allow for drainage. In-ground drainage and/or an irrigation system can be installed at this time.

STEP 6: Establish the final grade and lightly compact the soil surface with a roller so that it will hold the desired contour.

STEP 7: Select the proper turfgrass species. Warm-season turfgrass species recommended for home lawns that can be sodded in Louisiana include centipedegrass (publication 3624-QQ), St. Augustinegrass (publication 3624-AA), zoysiagrass (publication 3624-TT) and bermudagrass (publication 3624-OO).



Site prepared for sod

Considerations for Purchasing Sod

It is recommended that sod be purchased that has been grown under similar climatic and soil conditions as the site intended for establishment. Make sure that you are not mixing soil types (e.g., using sod grown on clay to establish on a sandy soil) because it can affect water infiltration and drainage, which are both necessary for proper turfgrass growth. A full pallet of sod will generally have 50 square yards (yd²) or 450 square feet (ft²) of turfgrass. Be prepared to purchase an additional 5% to 10% of the total area calculated for sod. Additional sod may be needed for irregular areas that require specially cut sod slabs or if a pallet has any damaged sod slabs that are undesirable for use.

Sod Installation

In Louisiana, sod can be established year-round. However, sod is more susceptible to desiccation and winter injury if established during dormancy (October to March).

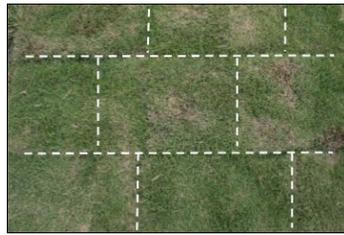
Sod should be installed as soon as possible after purchase or delivery. Delaying the establishment process will result in poor establishment or greater incidence of sod death.

Sod slabs should be installed in an offset "brick" pattern so that seams are staggered. Where the sod slabs meet, each piece should be adjacent to one another without overlapping. This will prevent gaps between the sod slabs for an even appearance and will reduce weed encroachment.

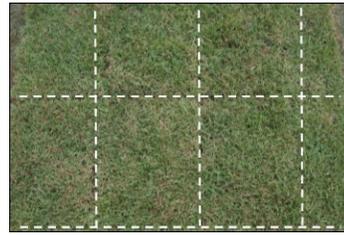
If the area has a reasonable slope, sod should be installed perpendicular to the slope. Sod staples may be necessary to help secure and stabilize sod slabs to the ground.

In irregular areas, trim any excess or overhanging pieces of sod with a shovel or sod knife to match the shape of the area. It is important to note that small sod pieces are more susceptible to desiccation, so trim and irrigate accordingly.

Directly following installation, irrigate until the sod and soil underneath are both moist. Do not irrigate to the point of surface runoff.



Recommended: "brick" pattern



Not recommended: grid pattern

Post-Installation Maintenance

Irrigation: Irrigation frequency will depend on environmental conditions and time of year. During active turfgrass growth, sod needs to be irrigated one to two times per day for the first 10 to 14 days. Irrigate so that the sod and soil underneath are both moist. After 14 days irrigation should be applied less frequently with longer durations between irrigations to encourage deeper rooting by the turfgrass. Be sure not to irrigate to a point of surface runoff. Although sod that is installed when dormant can be irrigated less frequently, dormant sod should be irrigated periodically to prevent winter desiccation.

Nitrogen Fertilization: Fertilize with up to 0.5 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet (ft²) when the turfgrass has rooted into the soil. Roots may appear within 30 to 60 days depending on environmental conditions. Rooting can be determined by pulling back a piece of sod; the more resistant the sod is to being pulled back indicates greater rooting. Subsequent nitrogen fertilization may be necessary. If sod is installed when dormant, do not fertilize until the turfgrass is actively growing. Never apply more than 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet (ft²) per application. Follow soil test recommendations for proper fertility if fertilizers were not incorporated during tilling in the preparation process.

Mowing and Traffic: During the establishment period it is best to limit traffic across the area to prevent turfgrass stress and surface disruption. Mowing should be initiated once the turfgrass begins to actively grow and the turfgrass is rooted into the soil. Rooting can be determined by pulling back a piece of sod; the greater the resistance to being pulled back, the greater the rooting. Make sure the soil is not saturated so that a mower does not rut or compact the soil. Follow the recommended mowing height for each species. Never remove more than one-third of the leaf blade at one mowing. Mowing at the appropriate height is key to having a healthy turfgrass and to prevent scalping and reduce weed encroachment.

Turfgrass	Mowing Height	Nitrogen Rate (per 1000 ft ² per year)
Bermudagrass	1 - 2 inches	Up to 3 pounds
Centipedegrass	1 - 2.5 inches	Up to 2 pounds
St. Augustinegrass	2.5 - 3 inches	Up to 3 pounds
Zoysiagrass	1 - 2.5 inches	Up to 2 pounds

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