

Overseeding for an Eco-lawn by Lauren Rama, April 2009

Most Calgary lawns are mainly Kentucky bluegrass, which needs lots of watering in dry Calgary. Folks often use fertilizer to help it grow and chemical pesticides to kill the weeds that thrive in it. Chemicals kill micro-organisms in the soil that ensure your grass gets nutrients from the soil. So the grass becomes less healthy, prompting the use of more fertilizer and water. This cycle pollutes waterways like Fish Creek.

The best way to go for a sustainable, low-maintenance eco-yard is to minimize the amount of lawn you have to just the area used for play or lying on the grass. Replace your lawn with vegetable gardens, aspen groves, a deck or patio, or flower, shrub and tree beds that are covered with natural mulches (leaves, wood chips).

Where lawn is appropriate, you can replace the grass type with hardy, low-growing grasses that need little water, fertilizer, or mowing.

Did you know? 40 to 70 percent of our treated water supply is used on landscapes. Half of this water is either wasted or not needed by the plants.

Overseeding

Overseeding is adding new grass seed to your existing lawn. Overseeding thickens up the lawn, preventing weeds. You can seed grasses that are hardy in Calgary!

Overseed in May, June and September when the weather is cool so tender grass seedlings will do well. If you overseed in early May, natural snowmelt and rain will help the grass seeds germinate. They need to be kept moist for 3 weeks to sprout so if it's dry, water for 10 minutes twice daily. Overseeding in late October is easiest. You need not water—just let the winter snow melt and spring rain encourage the seeds to sprout in the spring. You need to overseed 2 to 5 times, usually once a year for 2 to 5 years for the hardier grass types to take over your lawn.

Note: Avoid using corn gluten meal, a natural weed suppressant, for a month before overseeding or it will stop the seeds from sprouting.

Spread a thin layer of compost to overseed

Spread a 1 cm or 1/4 in layer of compost over your lawn first. This is about a cubic yard of compost for most lawns. Then use a seeder to spread the grass seed. Rake the seed into the compost lightly with a leaf rake.

What grass type to use

Overseeding or seed bare soil with Sheep's fescue in areas not sun-baked. In really sunny areas, use a low-maintenance mix with a lot of fescue grasses in it. Bow Point Nursery in Springbank has Sheep's Fescue seed and also a seed mix. Western Canada Compost will deliver compost.

Laureen Rama runs Eco-yards™, a landscape design, installation, and health (spraying actively aerated compost tea) business. Her book: *Eco-Yards™ : Simple steps to earth-friendly landscapes* is available at booksellers and her web-site www.eco-yards.com. She also offers overseeding in the Calgary area.