



# How to Install a Sod Lawn

## 1. CHOOSE A HIGH-QUALITY SOD

You can avoid many problems by buying sod of high quality and proper grass type. Most states have sod inspection programs to ensure that sod is free of weeds, diseases, and insects, and that it is the cultivar or species it is advertised to be.

## 2. PREPARE THE SOIL

Because you are laying actively growing grass with soil already attached, you may think that it is unnecessary to prepare the soil. Nothing could be more untrue.

Prepare the soil as you would for a seed lawn, but make the final grade to 1 inch lower, so that the sod fits flush against sidewalks and driveways. If a soil test indicates the need, add lime or sulfur.

Take the time to make the soil as level as possible. Use a leveling rake, if necessary. Once the sod is laid it is difficult to level. If large quantities of amendments have been added to parts or all of the future lawn area, wet the soil thoroughly to let the soil settle, allow it to dry, then regrade.

## 3. SPREAD FERTILIZER AND MOISTEN SOIL

If the proper amounts of fertilizer have been worked into the soil during site preparation, it is not usually necessary to fertilize again for six weeks or whenever the lawn starts showing the need. If fertilizer has not yet been added, rake in one with a high phosphorus content, such as formula 10-20-15, to a depth of 2 or 3 inches.

Lay sod on moist soil. Muddy soil causes footprints and uneven spots. Dry soil leads to drying and eventual weakening of the sod. If the soil is dry, wet it a day or so before the sod is delivered to give it adequate time to dry to a moist stage.

## 4. KEEP SOD MOIST

Be sure you are ready to install the sod by the time it is delivered. In hot weather, sod should not remain rolled or stacked for more than one day. In cool weather, it can remain healthy for two or three days.

Do not allow the soil on the outer rolls to dry out. Occasionally give the rolls a light sprinkling, but take care not to over saturate them or they will be difficult to handle.

## 5. START WITH A STRAIGHT EDGE

The easiest way to begin laying sod is to start with a straight edge, such as a sidewalk or driveway. If you have an irregularly shaped lawn, draw a straight line through it or string a line across it, and start laying sod on either side of it. Handle the sod strips carefully to avoid tearing or stretching them.

## 6. ROLL OUT THE SOD

Place the loose end of the rolled sod tightly against the previously laid strip and carefully unroll it. Stagger the ends of sod pieces much like a brick layer staggers the ends of the bricks.

When rolling out sod strips, stand or kneel on a board or piece of plywood to distribute your weight evenly. Otherwise, you are likely to end up with pockets and uneven spots in the lawn.

## 7. PLACE EDGES TIGHTLY TOGETHER

To avoid unnecessary drying, keep sod edges in the closest contact possible without overlapping. Firm the edges together with your fingers, but do not stretch the sod.

If gaps cannot be avoided, fill them with good soil or organic matter and pay close attention to them when watering; they will be the first areas to dry out. Do not attempt to fill small gaps (less than 3 or 4 inches square) with sod; small pieces of grass usually dry out and die. Assume that the sod will shrink slightly and open gaps, so compress the sod as you install it.

## 8. CUT PIECES TO FIT

Along curved edges or unusually shaped areas, cut with a sharp knife or garden spade to custom fit the turf. A knife with a serrated edge, such as an old bread knife, works best. As mentioned in step 5, begin laying sod in a straight line, and work toward irregular areas.

## 9. ROLL TO ENSURE CONTACT

After all the sod has been laid, roll it with a water-filled roller to ensure good contact between sod roots and underlying soil. Roll perpendicular to the length of the strips. If the weather is warm, you may have to roll the sod in sections as it is laid.

Rolling will also have a leveling effect, but it is still better to start with a level sod bed, rather than compacting the soil with repeated rolling.

## 10. WATER THOROUGHLY

Improper watering after installation is probably the most common cause of failure in sod lawns. Once the sod has been rolled, water it thoroughly. The soil underneath should be wet to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. From then on, watch your new lawn closely. The edges of the sod strips and pieces along sidewalks and driveways are the first to dry out and the last to knit with the soil. They may require spot watering every day, perhaps even more often in hot weather. Make sure the underlying soil is always moist. Once the lawn begins to knit with the soil, you can begin to approach a normal watering schedule.

Foot traffic can slow or damage the establishment of a sod lawn. To help avoid the problem, surround the area with stakes, string, and bright flags.