

Soil

This is the medium that provides the plant nutrients. It is essential that this is a good organic loam. The pH level is also very important. With the wrong level, the plants are unable to utilise the nutrients. The ideal pH level for fine turf is 6 to 7. Natural soil contains organic material, minerals, soil moisture and soil air. The mineral nutrients dissolve in soil moisture and are absorbed by the roots. Soil air is necessary for roots to breathe and affects chemical and biological processes in the soil.

Water

The most important watering is that carried out as soon as the turf is laid. One hour of watering at that time is equivalent to six hours watering later on. Special attention should be paid to the turf edges, as these are the areas that dry out the most, due to air getting underneath. This drying out can also cause the soil to shrink, preventing root to soil contact. A light roller after 7 to 10 days can help if this has occurred. Obviously natural rainfall is by far the best form of watering, as the grass and water temperatures are compatible. Cold mains water on a hot surface can cause shock and stress to the plants, so the best time to water in dry conditions is at the cooler morning or evening time of the day. Over-watering is just as damaging as under-watering, as this causes waterlogging and soil shrinkage. A slight deficiency is not always a bad thing, as it allows air into the soil and encourages the roots to go deeper, which is highly desirable.

Fertiliser

If you applied pre-turfing fertiliser during preparation prior to laying, your turf will have received all the fertiliser necessary to maintain healthy growth for at least two months after harvesting (depending on soil type). When applying chemical nutrients, great care should be taken and the manufacturers' recommendations must be followed to the letter. Over application of any chemical treatment can cause the plants to die. Simplicity is the key. Grass plants need a nitrogen rich fertiliser during the spring/summer growing season and phosphorus to encourage root growth during late autumn and winter. Fertiliser should be applied every 8 to 10 weeks throughout the growing season.

Mowing

7 to 10 days after laying turf in spring and summer, the grass should be well enough established to commence mowing. A good way to check is to see if it is possible to turn back a corner of the turf. If it is well anchored by root, it is alright to start mowing. For the first cut, make sure that the mower is set at a height to just top the grass. A good rule of thumb is to never remove more than 25% of the total plant. This prevents stress to the plant and if not using a grass box, will reduce the quantity of unsightly and damaging clippings. For the best results, mow at least twice weekly during the late spring, once a week during summer (if dry) and early autumn and approximately every 10 days in mid to late autumn. Obviously this must be flexible to suit our varied weather conditions. Make sure your mower is maintained and sharp, as badly maintained mowers can damage grass.

Dogs

For many years, bitches have taken the blame for destroying areas of lawn with their urine. Dog urine in concentration will also kill grass. There is really no cure other than prevention.

Disease

The most common disease affecting grass is Fusarium patch disease. This disease can cause tremendous damage if not tackled immediately with a suitable fungicide, a treatment which may have to be repeated more than once. Serious trouble with disease is usually only encountered when maintenance is not of the best, e.g. too much of the wrong fertiliser at the wrong time. Where fungicidal treatment of disease is considered necessary, it is important to remember infection is occurring on the roots of the grass so that penetration of the fungicide into the root zone is essential.

Weeds

The best weed treatment is prevention. This can be achieved by maintaining your lawn in good condition. Grass is a very competitive plant and if it is in a healthy state, weeds will find it hard to become established in a dense sward. However, weeds are also competitive and therefore capable of becoming established rapidly if damage or stress presents the opportunity. There are almost as many products for treating weeds as there are weed species. Basically, it is a matter of identifying the weeds and obtaining the appropriate product. As with fertiliser application, it is essential to follow the manufacturers' recommendations.