

Removing Moss from Your Lawn

In the Pacific Northwest, moss is a fact of life. Our soils can be very compacted. This can be caused by construction equipment used during home building, but in many cases, our soils tend to be glacial till that contains high levels of clay. This soil type, along with lower light levels west of the Cascades, makes an ideal breeding ground for moss, which likes shady, moist, compacted soils. Another factor that can contribute to moss growth is a more acidic (a lower pH) soil, which is due to our higher rainfall and leaching of the soils west of the Cascades. Moss can be controlled to an extent by making the soil in your lawn area more favorable for grass growth. Moss killers can be used, but they usually just burn the top off of the moss. If you don't fill in the area with something else, in other words competition, the moss will be back.

Removing and keeping moss from a lawn requires some effort. But, if you are willing to devote the time and energy needed to rid your lawn of moss, keep reading.

The following steps are a recommended method for removing the existing moss and improving your soil to grow grass. They should be started in the early spring, after the ground has dried out for two or three days, or in late summer, when you have begun watering your lawn or rainfall has returned.

1. Replace the mower blade on your mower with a de-thatching blade. This is available at a home improvement or hardware store and comes with replaceable tines that will remove the moss currently in your yard.
 - a. Set the height adjustment of your mower so that the tines touch the soil surface. Setting the height too low will remove not only the moss but all of your grass, so be careful with the adjustment.
 - b. Go over the entire lawn, removing as much moss as possible. This can be raked up and disposed of in the same manner as your grass clippings. You may find that two or three passes will be needed to remove all of the moss.
2. If results from a soil test show that you are deficient in calcium and the pH is below 5.5, then calcium should be applied to your lawn at the rate recommended on the bag. If you are deficient in both calcium and magnesium, spread dolomitic lime (available from garden centers) at a rate of approximately 10 pounds per 100 square feet. This will work its way into the soil, helping to reduce its acidity. Note: If you use more than the recommended amount, it can increase the amount of disease present in your lawn, so do not overapply. Expect the dolomitic lime to take about three months to work into the soil properly. If your lawn is compacted, it would be advisable to pull soil cores (aerify) your lawn before applying lime. In this way, the lime will go directly into the soil core holes and become available in the soil solution more quickly for the grass plants.
3. Select and spread a good "sun-shade mix" of grass seed at about ½ the normal seeding rate. Go to someplace such as your local nursery and buy it in bulk. Their seed is typically weed free and ideally suited for the Pacific Northwest. The seed can be raked right into the aerifier holes.
4. Following the directions on the package, spread a starter fertilizer to provide the immediate nutrients your new grass requires for establishment. (Note that starter fertilizer should only be used when reseeding, never on an established lawn.) If any fertilizer gets on a hard surface, be sure to sweep it into the lawn or back into the landscape so it doesn't wash directly into a water source when the area is irrigated or when it rains. You can

spread a ¼ inch of compost over the freshly seeded lawn and water the entire lawn using about 1 inch of water per week if there is not any rainfall. If the compost is lumpy when you remove it from the bag, you can use your mulching mower with a bagger to chop it finely. Pour the compost onto a clear area and run the mower over it, chopping it and collecting it into the bag. When it is loose and finely chopped, spread it over the entire lawn. This will provide a good foundation for your new grass and add nutrients and microbes which are needed for a healthy lawn. If you are not going to irrigate your lawn over the summer, do not spread the compost over the lawn, as it will dry out and become a hydrophobic layer and repel water when you begin irrigation in late summer. The existing grass itself can be used as a mulch to help keep the seed moist without a layer of compost.

5. During the first month, continue watering at the same 1 inch of water per week if there is not any rain to allow enough moisture for the new grass to grow and root into the soil. It is better to water several times per week than to apply all of the water in one application.
6. The grass should be mowed for the first time when it reaches about 3 inches. It should be mowed to about two inches and continue watering at a rate of about 1 inch of water per week if needed.
7. Use a soil test to determine if you need to apply lime before you make any other applications.
8. This method will help you have a beautiful, moss-free lawn with some continued effort. When the moss does begin coming back, you can dethatch and reseed as needed. Remember, if you only seed selected areas of your lawn, it can turn out to look patchy if you don't use the same seed for all of the areas. Whenever you find it necessary to reseed a portion of your lawn, Follow the steps listed above.

Keep in mind that there are some areas that are just too shady to grow grass, and you will never get rid of the moss in those areas.