



Lawn Top Dressing Fact Sheet

Top dressing is the process of applying compost, soil, or sand over the surface of your lawn. It is common for gardens keen on getting a really high quality even lawn. It may also be commonly used when laying new turf to make sure that the turf joins knit together over the first few weeks of the new lawns new growth in the new location.

Growing a healthy lawn is really the same as growing healthy garden plants. It starts with having a good soil. A good soil is living soil. The many thousands of different living things in soil are really important to cycle nutrients, suppress diseases and break down organic matter. One tablespoon of soil can contain billions of micro-organisms.

Top dressing should encourage microorganisms and add to the overall fertility of the soil. Below is a list of some of the benefits when topdressing lawns.

- Top dressing adds organic matter to soils.
- Top dressing can build up the soil flora.
- Top dressing with core aeration helps change soil structure.
- Compost top dressing can help reduce lawn diseases.
- Adding compost helps reduce traffic stress.
- Compost incorporated into heavy soils helps relieve compaction problems.
- Compost incorporated into sandy soils helps with water retention.
- Top dressing with the right materials can help reduce the need for fertilizer.
- Top dressing can help reduce thatch.



Healthy even lawn



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Choosing the Right Materials to Top dress lawns

When top dressing lawns, compost is the best material. Choosing the right compost material is important, since all compost is not equal in nutrient levels.

To lower the cost of the topdressing, some have mixed the compost with topsoil or sand. If you decide to do this, it is very important to match the soil you plan to use with the soil you have in your lawn. Not all soils are compatible.

The rule is: when top dressing lawns, do not spread finer textured soils over coarse textured soils. Most problems occur for those with sandy soils, when fine sand/compost is mixed over a coarse sand/soil lawn. The problem this brings is a layer or crust over the surface of the soil. So the rule of thumb should be if you have a clay based soil then a coarse top dressing with some fine components is ok. If you have a sandy loam soil the top dressing should be a sandy loam or coarser material.

The top dressing that I have been using is a combination of sieved red topsoil, composted chicken manure, coarse sand, composted sawdust (only a very small amount) and sieved ash. The advantage of using this mix is that it adds some organic matter and nutrients to the soil which is one of the ideas of top dressing.



Top dressing with a mixture of organic and inorganic ingredients ready to be spread over a clay based volcanic red soil.



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Steps for top dressing lawns

When top dressing lawns, there are several important steps that can be done to ensure good results. They are listed in the order they should be performed. Not all these steps need to be done on all grasses, so just eliminate the steps you are not performing.

- Choose the correct top dressing based on your soil type
- If your lawn has more than 12mm of thatch, dethatch your lawn first. Dethatching will leave a lot of debris on the surface, so you will need to remove it before mowing or top dressing. That can be done in the next step.
- Mow the lawn as low as possible without stressing the grass too much.
- Bag or remove all of the grass clippings and dethatching debris, if you haven't already done so.
- Core aerate the lawn. If you have poor soil, consider removing the cores. If the soil is not too bad, leave them on the grass to break down naturally.
- Spread top dressing over lawn to a depth of 6—12mm. This is also the chance to fill in holes in the lawn.
- Lightly brush the grass with the backside of a rake. The object is to get as much top dressing touching the soil as possible.
- Water thoroughly and evenly. As a guide look at applying around 12mm of water over the whole lawn to encourage deep rooting of the lawn.



Deep even watering is important to establish. Top dress to help new turf “knit”.

Adapted from <http://www.lawn-care-academy.com/top-dressing-lawns.html>