



## **Instant, Foolproof Lawn Repairs with Turfgrass Sod**

Jay Deputy

Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences

A patch of dead grass, even a small one, in an otherwise nice lawn can be an eyesore and a source of aggravation unless you know how to fix it correctly and quickly. Turfgrass sod—strips of mature grass with the roots attached—can make patching a lawn a fast, one-time task.

Do-it-yourselfers and others can easily get a handle on what to look for when buying sod and how to correctly install it. Follow these steps for repairing a lawn with turfgrass sod.

### **Step 1**

Identify what caused the old grass to die and fix that problem. Common culprits: too much traffic on the area, root-eating insects, disease or a chemical that spilled on the area. Fix the source of the problem, or you'll be repeating this step this over and over again.

### **Step 2**

Prepare the area for replanting. Outline the patch area with boards, string or chalk, surrounding the dead area with straight sides. The straight sides will make it easier to fit the new sod without a lot of trimming, gaps or holes. Next, till, spade, or otherwise loosen the soil under the dead patch and rake it smooth while you remove roots, clods, rocks, and other debris. For best results, the soil in your yard and the soil the sod was grown in should be similar. Most sod farms in Hawai'i grow the grass in a thin layer of compost on a plastic liner. If your yard has poor soil (heavy clay, for example), it should be improved by tilling in several inches of compost during

soil preparation. Mix in a small amount of a fertilizer high in phosphorus—about ½ pound of 10-30-10 per 100 square feet of planting area. This will aid development of a healthy root system. Matching the soil between farm and yard does not have to be exacting, but avoid extreme differences.

### **Step 3**

Buy the same species of grass that is already in your lawn. Different types of grass have different maintenance requirements, such as water needs, mowing heights, and shade tolerances. If you have a bermudagrass lawn, El Toro zoysia sod is not a good match. Know what fresh, high-quality sod looks like. Uniformity is important. Every piece of sod should be the same width, length, and thickness, with right-angle edges on all sides. It should all have been mowed to the same height, and there should not be any noticeable weeds or dissimilar grasses. When you look at the underside, the soil should be moist with no signs of dried roots. Every piece of sod should be strong enough to be lifted from one end and not fall apart.

### **Step 4**

Measure the four sides of the tilled area and convert this to square feet. (3 feet wide by 4 feet long equals 12 square feet, for example). Purchase enough fresh sod from a turfgrass sod farm, home center, or garden center to finish the repair. Garden centers usually sell sod in plastic flats that are 12 inches by 18 inches (1½ square feet); sod farms cut larger sections, typically 2 feet by 4 feet (8 square feet), directly from the field.

### **Step 5**

Within hours of buying the sod, begin installing it onto the tilled area by placing the first piece along the longest straight line. All subsequent pieces of sod should be

\*CTAHR Popular Press articles were written to appear as newspaper columns and therefore are of necessity brief and sometimes simplified treatments of their subjects. For more detailed information resources, visit [www.ctahr.hawaii.edu](http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu).

aligned tightly against the first piece, without stretching or overlapping. If cutting is necessary, use a sharp utility knife or razor blade. Cut on the underside of the sod using a board as a straight line guide.

**Step 6**

Ensure that the new sod has good contact with the soil underneath either by using a half-filled lawn roller or placing foot-square boards on the new sod and walking on the boards a few times. If necessary, fill in any gaps between pieces with topsoil.

**Step 7**

Water the new turf patch until the soil under the sod is wet but not saturated. Depending on how sunny the location is, the amount of wind, and other drying conditions, you may have to water the patch more than once a day for the first week. If the soil beneath the sod is not wet, you need to apply more water. During the grow-in, you can check to see how well the sod is rooting by lightly tugging on a corner of a sod piece.

**Step 8**

Restrict traffic on the area for at least two weeks to give the grass a chance to grow roots and for the soil to settle.

**Step 9**

Mow the area about two weeks after patching, or whenever the sod is tightly rooted. If possible, try to run your mower diagonally across the sod seams. This will reduce rutting and the chance of your mower lifting a corner of sod from the new patch. Make sure the mower blades are sharp.

Any finally, know what care is required for your lawn. Every type of turfgrass has unique requirements for watering, fertilizer, and mowing that should be understood and implemented to keep a lawn beautiful for years to come. Without proper maintenance, the benefits of all of the other efforts to create a beautiful lawn can be lost. By knowing what to do and when to do it, you don't have to become a slave to your lawn.