

Features

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What's Frost Seeding?

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Are you looking for a way to boost your fall and late winter sales? Then you may want to consider promoting frost seeding—a potential introduction and lead-in to the spring lawn care season.

Frost seeding isn't a well-known lawn care practice for homeowners. Many farmers use it to increase their pasture grasses and landscaping companies provide this service to promote thicker, stronger lawns.

There aren't many garden professionals—including at your local extension—that realize that frost-seeding lawns is a viable option for improving turfgrass. As a garden center, you can fill in the gap and become the trusted lawn experts DIY homeowners need while also providing a new retail opportunity. You'll need to train your staff on frost seeding to counteract common misconceptions about it.

Depending on your region, frost seeding typically begins in late winter or early spring. Conversely, you can apply a divot mix to patchy areas or thinning areas at any time of the year.

Here are frost seeding basics:

- It uses Mother Nature's freeze/thaw cycles for moisture and better seed-to-soil contact.
- Customers should work the soil with a Garden Weasel or aerate the soil in the fall before seeding.
- Don't use a power-rake to aerate the soil.
- Plant larger turf seeds with harder casing to prevent rotting.
- Protect the newly planted grass seed with a ¼ of an inch of pine needles or other grass seeding mulch.
- Don't use the technique on a lawn needing complete renovation.

Brad Jakubowski, Assistant Teaching Professor of Turfgrass and Irrigation Science at Penn State University, recommended keeping a divot mix handy, which consists of topsoil, grass seed and compost, which homeowners can store in a container with a lid.

Scott Wagner, President of 1st Impressions Landscape and Garden Center in Sunbury, Ohio, also recommended frost seeding because it's a solid lawn practice. While you can't expect to reseed your entire lawn with frost seeding without mechanically removing existing turf, you can cover up bare patches or where

there's thin grass to prepare it for a spring green-up.

Scott said, "For the DIY market, frost seeding is an easy method for overseeding lawns because you broadcast seed on bare ground and allow the freeze/thaw cycle to do the work."

Common Misconceptions

"Many people believe that February or early March is too cold or too early to plant grass seed and that grass seed will rot if planted at this time," Scott said. "However, certain grass blends, such as fescue and perennial rye that have harder seed casings and shorter germination times, can tolerate the exposure to moist spring soil conditions and being on the ground for a longer period of time.

Additionally, equip your staff with the facts to guide customers to turfgrass blends that are most suitable for frost seeding, like educating them and your customers on the right grass blend, ensuring that it won't rot in the soil as Scott mentioned above.

Tackling the Pre-Emergent Conundrum

Many homeowners don't want crabgrass sprouting in their spring lawns, so they'll apply pre-emergent herbicide as soon as the soil is warm enough for it. However, pre-emergent weed control will stop turfgrass seedlings from germinating as well because it creates a barrier preventing all seeds from developing.

Here's how to help customers who want to apply pre-emergent herbicides and also want to plant grass seed at the same time:

- Remind customers that they don't want to put down pre-emergent at the same time as seeding their lawns. Both inputs can be applied when soil temperatures reach 55F (12C)—or when the forsythia shrub blooms.
- Promote specialty pre-emergents, such as Siduron, that kill crabgrass without affecting turfgrass growth.
- Feature post-emergent herbicide applications after seedlings emerge from the ground.

Brad said, "Some people think that [frost seeding is] useless, won't work and not worth the time and effort. They want 100% success. Weeds don't expect 100% success when they reseed. The reality is you can expect less than 100% germination, but grass is one of the cheapest inputs that homeowners can use on their lawns."

You can reverse DIYers' misconceptions by turning their hesitations into learning opportunities. Even a brief staff meeting on correcting common frost seeding myths empowers your team to handle sales conversations with confidence.

What You Can Carry

"If in doubt, seed," Brad said when it comes to coaching homeowners on seeding whenever they can. He also advises homeowners to overseed their lawns after the first frost, which kills crabgrass.

Here are some quick tips for adding frost-seeding products and sales:

- Stock up on Garden Weasels to prepare the soil for divot mix and improve seed-to-soil contact.
- Sell pine needles or pelletized fiber products to cover the seeded area and enhance turf growth.
- Encourage your customers to invest in the proper seeds to provide a thicker lawn that naturally crowds

out weeds (consult the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program trial results at ntep.org for the best region-specific grass blends).

Marketing and Education

While frost seeding appeals to a smaller audience, there's potential for late winter and early spring sales on grass seed, compost and other lawn care products. Plus, you can stand out in your region as a frost seeding expert because it's an undervalued practice—which may encourage more homeowners to try this method of early seeding and using Mother Nature's freeze/thaw cycles.

Use education as a sales differentiator rather than just selling grass seed and other frost seeding products. For example, consider offering these educational opportunities for homeowners:

- Host a free Saturday workshop on frost seeding.
- Upload a Frost Seeding 101 blog post, positioning your garden center as the go-to experts.
- Train your staff to answer tough frost seeding questions confidently.
- Upload social media posts with pictures of divot mix or video of how to use a Garden Weasel for frost seeding.
- Partner with a landscaping company to provide a frost seeding demonstration.
- Create signage explaining step-by-step frost seeding, equipping customers to try it on their lawns.
- Don't forget to strategically place grass seed, soil products and weed tools in your lawn care section.

Use frost seeding to kick off the spring lawn season when customers will be coming to you for advice on other lawn care products, such as fertilizers, soil amendments and equipment. It can open the door to an early spring season boost, leading into increased spring sales, while also positioning your garden center as an expert in frost seeding and all things related to lawn care. **GP**

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