

Removing Existing Sod/Turf Grass

In order to set the stage for restoration and allow native seeds and plants to begin filling in around the trees and shrubs you will be planting, the existing turf grass should be removed/killed. There are a number of different ways in which the turf grass can be dealt with and below is a summary of each. If on steep slopes, keep in mind which option you use so not to expose soil to erosion.



1.) Smothering

This option is cost effective, easy, and efficient. This method involves blocking sunlight from reaching the grass which will slowly kill it over time. Cover the site with either black plastic, old carpet, plywood or a thick layer of leaves or newspaper. Leave it in place for a full growing season. Remove the “smother cover” in the fall or the following spring. The best option is to use the newspaper technique. Simply lay down at least 10 layers of plain black and white newspapers (avoid colored papers, dyes, and inks which may contain chemicals) and then cover the newspaper with a few inches (2-4in) of wood mulch which will help to hold down the newspaper and kill the grass. Take care to make sure the sections of newspaper overlap each other so there is no room for light reach the soil. The newspaper and dead sod will break down in the soil and doesn't need to be removed later on. At any point in the process, you can clear away some mulch and actually plant your trees and shrubs directly into the smothered sod and newspaper layer.

2.) Remove by Hand

This option involves more hand labor. Simply cut the sod out with a shovel. The process is the same as if you were creating a new garden or flowerbed. Start with small manageable areas, maybe 10 ft x 10ft and outline the area of grass to be removed with a shovel or spade. Next, begin cutting out small sections that are deep enough to get under the existing root system and pull up the pieces of sod. Shake the sod clumps to knock off the loose topsoil and either throw them in a compost pile or use the sod clumps to start grass in other areas outside of the vegetative buffer.

3.) Use a Sod-Cutter

Sod-cutters can be rented to clear a large area in a relatively short amount of time. Gas powered sod cutters come in a variety of shapes and sizes. You can even find manual ones. Remove the top two to three inches of grass and soil using a sod-cutter. Shake the sod clumps to knock off the loose topsoil and either throw them in a compost pile or use the sod clumps to start grass in other areas outside of the vegetative buffer. The downside to sod-cutters is that you can sometimes run into problems where there are a lot of roots and/or rocks.

4.) ~~Herbicide~~ Not Recommended

Due to the close proximity of public waters, herbicides are not recommended for application to turf grass near shoreland areas. Not only can herbicides be harmful to water quality, but it may kill native plants and grasses nearby. In addition, climatic conditions like humidity, wind, and temperature need to be just right in order for herbicides to be safely and effectively applied. They are considerably more expensive than smothering and/or cutting out sod by hand.