

## **Sanding a lawn, is it worth it?**

Some people think putting sand out in their yard is a sure way to fix a bad lawn. It's called topdressing a lawn. Done for the right reason and correctly, it does have some benefits. Done for the wrong reason and incorrectly, it can cause more trouble than it's worth.

In today's article, I'll share some personal experience, advice from Theresa Friday, UF/IFAS Horticulture Agent in Santa Rosa County and wisdom from Dr. Bryan Unruh, Extension Turfgrass Specialist at the University of Florida and co-author of *The Florida Lawn Handbook*.

In home lawns, topdressing to fill in low spots or level uneven areas can be beneficial. A bumpy, rough, uneven lawn is annoying, difficult to mow and allows water to puddle—which can damage the turf's root system.

Recently, with what little time I have to devote to lawn work, I've been filling in low areas in my yard.

To fill a low spot, shovel the sand, no more than about an inch deep, into the area. It's best to maintain the lawn normally until the grass has grown on top of the first layer. Repeat until the low spot is filled.

It can be difficult to evenly spread the sand in a timely manner. Homeowners start with the best intentions (me included) of spreading the sand consistently and finishing by the end of the day only to find that the job is slow and difficult. The sand pile remains in the same spot for days, or longer, shading out and frequently killing the grass below. Once the initial enthusiasm wanes, just trying to reduce the mountain of sand overcomes the objective of spreading it consistently and evenly over the lawn. The end result is dozens of small mounds of sand all over the lawn.

Homeowners are sometimes convinced that topdressing will improve the condition of their lawn by increasing the spread and thickness of their turf.

"Topdressing home lawns has minimal agronomic benefits" according to Unruh. When asked his advice for homeowners on topdressing, his reply was "don't".

Topdressing your lawn with sand on a regular basis is not a recommended practice. You can introduce weed seeds, nematodes and even diseases with some sources of lawn dressing. Topdressing soil should be free of weeds and nematodes (sterilized is ideal) and should be of the same soil type (texture) as that on which the turf is growing. While minor low spots can be corrected this way, you can easily overdo it and smother your lawn. Using topsoil from an unknown source may introduce undesirable plants and weeds into the landscape, creating additional work and expense to correct the problem.

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