

“Ask The Plant Groom™ by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom™

For: QA 1038

Is it time to plant pansies? What type of soil do they need? Thanks. - P. D.

It depends is the best answer. If night time temperatures are in the 60's and day time is in the 70's for a couple of weeks it's time to plant.

These beauties need full sun locations and elevated beds that drain well. They will grow in sandy or clay soils as long as it drains well. Starting a fresh bed in clay soil blend 6" of finished compost or 3" of finished compost plus 3" of expanded shale with the existing soil.

After soil amending is complete crown or mound your planting bed to the center 4 – 6". This too will improve drainage. A garden rake usually works well for this operation. In sandy soils only use compost or other quality organic matter. No expanded shale is needed in sandy soils. This is considered an Earth Kind method of planting bed preparation.

**NOTE:** When you visit the State Fair of Texas this season look for and review the Earth Kind Rose™ demonstration/exhibit. It's located across the drive and south of the Kids and Critters exhibit.

We have a new home and need to know if it's OK to plant sod now? If not, what should we do to hold the mud down this winter? – G. O.

If you live in (USDA) United States Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zone 9 which is along the Texas coast and Rio Grande Valley your planting now should be acceptable. For the rest of Texas it is a gamble.

Zone 8 stretches from Dallas to San Antonio. Zone 7 is north of zone 8 and zone 6 is in the TX panhandle. The complete USDA Plant hardiness zone map for TX and the country may be located at [www.usna.usda.gov](http://www.usna.usda.gov)

One practice that will work in all TX “zones” is the planting of annual rye grass ... now. Once established it is winter hardy statewide. It will fizzle out in the spring around the time to install nearly all permanent lawn grasses.

One relatively new release of grass from Texas Agriculture Experiment Station, Texas A & M Research and extension Center-Dallas you may want to consider is 'Reveille' Bluegrass. This is a cross between native TX bluegrass and KY bluegrass. It is green year round.

Visit <http://dallas.tamu.edu/> and click the Reveille Bluegrass link for more information on this grass variety.

It is in limited production so if you are interested in securing some for your yard my council is to seek suppliers now. Bluegrass may be planted in the fall. KY bluegrass will not handle the TX heat. TX bluegrass will handle our heat. 'Reveille', the hybrid of TX and KY bluegrass will remain green year round and handle TX heat.

Prior to planting any TX lawn from sod, plugs, sprigs, seed or hydromulching make sure your area(s) are graded the way you need them to be. Grade can be changed in existing turf but it's more difficult and costly. The next step is to remove any rocks, sticks and building debris. Your lawn would love to have 3" of compost tilled into the top 6" and raked. However, this is not a ... "have to do".

After tiling and raking you are ready to plant. At the minimum, thoroughly rake the area(s). If you decide to plant a temporary lawn of ryegrass calculate 8 – 10lbs of current season/year seed per 1,000sq. ft. Sow the seeds with a broadcast spreader, keep moist and you should be in the "temporary lawn business" within two weeks.

After you mow 2 –3 time rye grass may be fertilized. Be careful because you may be mowing more often that you prefer. I have never fertilized rye grass in a lawn because the growth and color have been sufficient for my tastes. It will turn dark green with (N) nitrogen fertilizers and provide you more time keeping it mowed. The decision to fertilize is yours.

Dale's Notes:

\* Now is a super time to plant winter hardy landscape plants including trees and shrubs.

- Purchase spring blooming bulbs from local retailers now to insure quantity, quality, color and varieties you desire to plant. Tulips and hyacinths need approximately 6 weeks of chilling prior to planting. Nearly all spring blooming "bulbs" do best planted during late Nov. – early Dec. in TX.
- Prepare to move desirable houseplants indoors. Check for and if found eliminate all pests. Repot now if need and utilize a premium quality potting soil when repotting. The usual action is to move up the pot size 2" in diameter at each repotting.

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