

How to... lay a lawn

In his new DIY landscaping series, **Kevin Smith** helps you create those permanent fixtures. This month, lay the perfect lawn. Photos Jason Ingram

One of the simplest ways to remedy a tired, shapeless lawn is to dig it up and lay a new one from turf. It might seem a bit drastic, but this approach will instantly transform a dull patch into a lush green space. One of the great things about using turf is that no weeds or moss spoil the effect. Autumn is the ideal time to get cracking, as it's still warm and plenty of rain helps the new grass establish roots before winter.

A stylish brick edging finishes off the lawn perfectly, and is something you can easily recreate in your own garden. It's easy to lay (ideal for a first bash at DIY landscaping) and you can mow over the top of it for a neat finish. The topsoil enabled us to create a level surface and also ensured the turf got off to a flying start. So, what are you waiting for?

WE USED Materials

Line-marking paint (Screwfix, £7.99 for 750ml, 0500 414 141, www.screwfix.com)
Building sand (Wickes, £30 per 900kg bag, 0870 608 9001, www.wickes.co.uk for your nearest branch)
Cement (Wickes, £3.29 for a 25kg bag, as above)
Woburn rumbled pavioirs (Bradstone, from £19.08 per sq m, 01335 372 289, www.bradstone.com for stockists)
Topsoil (Rolawn, £79.95 per cubic metre bag, 0845 604 6080, www.rolawn.co.uk for stockists)
Turf (Rolawn, £3.49 per sq m, as above)

Tools

Broom handle, string, pointing trowel, rubber mallet, spirit level, hammer, bolster chisel, wheelbarrow, spade/shovel, rake, sharp knife



1 Prepare the area, levelling the ground and getting rid of big stones, and use the line-marking paint to spray the shape of your lawn. To create a circle, tie string to a central pole, pull it taut to your chosen diameter and mark the string with the paint. Keeping the string taut, and holding the can at the mark, walk in a circle spraying as you go, keeping close to the ground.



6 Lay the turves on the soil, staggering the joins like brickwork. Butt them as closely as possible, but make sure they don't overlap. Try not to walk on the turf, and if you're laying a large area, work off a plank of wood. Leave any awkward shapes to the end, cutting it to fit. Bang the turf down with the back of a rake to make sure its underside makes full contact with the soil.



2 Following your sprayed line, lay the pavioirs on a bed of mortar (five parts building sand to one part cement) 5-8cm (2-3in) deep. Lay a section at a time, mixing mortar as you go, so it doesn't set before you're ready to use it. Use the marked string to check you're working in a circle, while a spirit level will ensure all the pavioirs are at the same level. Tap them in place with a rubber mallet. If you need to break a paviour for a neat join, use the hammer and bolster chisel.



7 Cut off any excess turf with a sharp knife, to create a clean edge, before giving the whole area a good water.



3 When the edging is set (it's best to leave it overnight), dig over the soil inside the circle, as it will have become very compacted while you've been working. Remove all large stones, pieces of mortar and any weeds, and make sure you break up the soil as much as possible, as deeply as possible.

4 Use a wheelbarrow to add topsoil to the area until it's level with the top of the edging. Even it out with a rake.



8 It will take a few weeks for your lawn to establish, and in that time it's essential you don't let the turves dry out. Water them regularly until they have rooted into the top soil, otherwise they will shrink and gaps will appear. Also make sure you water thoroughly, so moisture permeates through to the ground, helping the grass knit with the soil. You can start mowing the grass when it is 12-15cm (4¾-6in) high.

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5 Walk across the area on your heels, taking small, heavy steps to firm down the soil. Use more topsoil to level out the dips you create and compress it again with your heels. Give the surface a final rake over.