



Lawn and Yard Solutions

(209) 442-3567 | richard@lawnandyardsolutions.com



Your New Sod Care Guide

Everything You Need to Know After Installation

Congratulations on your new sod!

Your lawn is a living investment, and the next 2–4 weeks are the most critical period in its life — this is when roots sever, reestablish, and bond to the soil beneath. Following these guidelines closely will give your lawn the best possible start and protect the investment you've made in your home's beauty and value. Your lawn care professional is always just a call away if you have questions along the way. *Actual needs vary by sod type, soil, season, and weather.*



Quick Reference Summary

Use this table as your at-a-glance guide throughout the establishment period.

Phase	Timeframe	Watering	Foot Traffic	Mowing	Fertilizing
Establishment	First 24 hours	Within 30 min; 2–4x throughout day	None	None	None
Root Growth	Days 2–10	2–4x daily	None	None	None
Early Rooting	Days 10–14	1–2x daily	Light if tug test OK	First mow at 4" height	Starter if not pre-applied
Transitioning	Weeks 2–6	Every other day*	Normal	Weekly	2nd starter, wk 4–6
Established	Month 2+	1–1.5"/wk	Unrestricted	Weekly at 3–3.5"	Balanced fert. wk 8

Watering Schedule

Water is the single most important factor in sod establishment. New sod has severed roots and relies entirely on surface moisture to survive until it can draw water from the soil on its own. Follow this schedule precisely.

First 30 Minutes After Installation

Water immediately — do not wait. Begin irrigation within 30 minutes of sod being laid. Delaying can cause rapid desiccation of the root mat, especially in warm or windy conditions.

Days 1–10: Frequent, Light Watering

- Water **2–4 times daily**, keeping the soil consistently damp.
- The soil should be moist **2–3 inches deep** at all times — not saturated, not dry.
- To check moisture: **lift a corner of the sod** and press a finger into the soil beneath. It should feel like a damp sponge.
- In hot, dry, or windy weather (common in Central Valley summers), increase frequency to 4 sessions per day.

Days 10–14: Begin Tapering

- Reduce to **1–2 waterings per day** as roots begin attaching to the soil.
- The sod should begin to resist gentle pulling — this is your signal that roots are taking hold.

Weeks 2–4: Deeper, Less Frequent

- Water every other day for 10–15 minutes per zone as a starting point; adjust for sprinkler coverage, soil type, temperature, wind, and moisture checks.
- Encourage deeper root growth by allowing the top inch of soil to dry slightly between cycles. Aim for damp soil 2–3 inches deep, not standing water.

Month 2 and Beyond: Mature Watering

- Water **1 to 1.5 inches per week**, delivered in 1–2 deep sessions rather than daily light sprinkles.
- Deep, infrequent watering trains roots to grow downward, creating a drought-tolerant lawn.

Best time to water: Always water in the **early morning** (between 4 AM and 9 AM). This reduces evaporation and significantly lowers the risk of fungal disease.

Pro Tip — Watering Balance

Too much water is just as harmful as too little. If water pools on the surface or you notice a slimy texture, stop watering and allow the area to absorb and partially dry before your next cycle. Overwatering deprives roots of oxygen and invites disease.

Walking & Foot Traffic Restrictions

New sod roots have not yet anchored to the soil. Even light pressure can disrupt root-to-soil contact and create permanent damage to the sod mat. Protecting your lawn from foot traffic in the early weeks is non-negotiable.

First 10–14 Days: No Foot Traffic Until Roots Pass the Tug Test

- **No foot traffic of any kind until the sod passes the tug test — not children, not pets, not adults.**
- Sod roots cannot anchor properly under weight before bonding with the soil beneath.
- Even a single heavy footstep can compress the root zone and create dead spots.

The Tug Test

Before allowing any traffic, perform the **tug test**: grasp a piece of sod near a seam and gently pull upward.

- **If it resists** — roots are forming. Light foot traffic may begin.
- **If it lifts easily** — roots are not yet established. Stay off for additional days.

Days 10–14: Light Traffic Only

- Once the tug test is passed (typically around day 10–14), light foot traffic is permitted.
- Avoid concentrated paths, turns, or pivoting movements on the sod.

Weeks 3–4: Normal Traffic Resumes

- Normal foot traffic can resume once visible rooting is confirmed and the first mow has been completed.
- Continue to avoid heavy loads, play equipment, or sustained activity in one area until month 2.

Important — Equipment Warning

Avoid parking lawn equipment, trailers, or vehicles on new sod at any point during the establishment period. The concentrated weight can permanently destroy root zones and create compaction that impairs drainage for years.

Mowing Timing & Technique

Patience before the first mow is one of the most important gifts you can give your new lawn. Premature mowing stresses roots that are still in the critical anchoring phase.

When to Mow

- **Do NOT mow for the first 10–14 days** under any circumstances.
- The first mow should occur when grass blades reach **4 inches in height**.
- Never remove more than one-third of the blade in a single mowing session — this is the cardinal rule of lawn mowing. If the lawn gets too tall, lower the height gradually over multiple mowings instead of cutting it short all at once.
- After the first cut, maintain a blade height of **3 to 3.5 inches** for most sod varieties.

Mowing Best Practices

- **For the healthiest lawn, mow weekly once the sod is established and actively growing.** Regular mowing encourages thicker, denser turf and helps prevent stress from cutting too much at once.
- **Sharp blades are essential.** Dull blades tear young root tissue rather than cutting cleanly, causing browning and stress.
- Mow in **alternating directions** each time to prevent matting and encourage upright growth.
- **Do not mow wet sod** — wet blades clump and can pull the sod from the soil.
- After mowing, give the lawn a light watering to help it recover from the stress of cutting.

Pro Tip — When in Doubt, Wait

Mowing too soon is one of the most common — and most damaging — mistakes homeowners make with new sod. If you're not sure whether it's time, wait one more day. A slightly taller lawn is always safer than a damaged root system.

Fertilizing Timeline

Fertilizing at the right times dramatically accelerates root development and long-term lawn health. Fertilizing at the wrong times can burn young roots and set back your lawn's progress.

Days 1–10: No Fertilizer

Do **not** apply any fertilizer during the first 10 days. The sod's focus is on moisture absorption and initial root contact — not nutrient uptake.

Days 10–14: Starter Fertilizer

- Apply a **starter fertilizer** if one was not pre-applied at installation.
- Look for a **high-phosphorus blend** (the middle number on the fertilizer bag, e.g., 18-24-12). Phosphorus is the key nutrient for root development.
- Always water thoroughly after applying to activate nutrients and prevent burn.

Weeks 4–6: Second Starter Application

- A second application of starter fertilizer may be applied to sustain early root and blade development.
- Continue watering after each application.

Week 8 (Month 2): Transition to Balanced Fertilizer

- Switch to a **balanced, nitrogen-based lawn fertilizer** (e.g., 32-0-10 or similar) to fuel continued green growth and overall lawn vigor.
- **Avoid weed-and-feed products** for the first 60 days — herbicides in these blends can damage young, vulnerable root systems.

Never Fertilize Stressed Sod

If your sod is wilting, browning, or showing signs of drought stress, do not apply fertilizer. Water first, allow the sod to fully recover, and then proceed with your fertilizing schedule. Fertilizing stressed sod accelerates damage.

What to Expect: The Rooting Process

Understanding what is normal week by week will give you confidence and help you spot real problems early. Not everything that looks alarming is cause for concern.

Timeframe	What You'll See	What's Happening
Days 1–3	Slight wilting, spongy feel, possible color dullness	Roots are severed from their growing environment and are reestablishing surface contact. This is completely normal.
Days 4–7	Color deepens, sod firms up, seams may be visible	Root hairs are beginning to extend downward. The sod should feel more stable, even though you should still avoid walking on it.
Days 8–14	Seam lines may appear, slight variation in color between pieces	Root hairs are connecting to the soil. Seam lines and minor color differences between sod pieces are completely normal at this stage.
Weeks 2–4	Sod is harder to lift, new leaf growth visible	Active rooting is underway. New leaf growth is a positive sign of root system activity and establishment.
Month 2+	Uniform color, seams faded, firm turf	Full establishment. Seam lines will continue to fade as the lawn fills in. Your lawn should look and feel like a mature, healthy turf.

Normal Variation Note

Seam lines and slight color variation between sod pieces in the first few weeks are completely normal and are not a sign of failure. As roots fill in and the lawn matures, these differences will blend naturally into a uniform surface.

Troubleshooting: Signs of Stress

If something doesn't look right, use this guide to diagnose and respond quickly. Early action almost always prevents a minor issue from becoming a serious one.

Symptom	Likely Cause	Recommended Action
Yellowing or Pale Color	Underwatering or overwatering	Lift a corner: dry soil = water more; soggy, compacted soil = water less and improve drainage.
Brown Patches	Heat stress, underwatering at edges, or poor soil contact	Check edges and hardscape-adjacent areas first — these dry out fastest. Increase watering duration in affected zones.
Lifting or Gaps Between Pieces	Insufficient watering causing shrinkage, or poor soil prep	Re-lay or press down edges and increase hydration. Call your lawn care professional if the gap is significant or persistent.
Mushrooms or Fungus	Overwatering or watering at night	Reduce watering frequency and switch to morning-only watering. Treat with an appropriate fungicide if the problem persists.
Slimy Texture or Foul Smell	Severe overwatering and oxygen deprivation	Allow the area to dry out fully before the next watering cycle. Evaluate drainage and aerate if the problem recurs.
Insects or Grub Damage	Soil pests attracted during establishment	Contact your lawn care professional for a soil inspection and appropriate, sod-safe treatment plan before applying any products.

Top 5 Rules & When to Call

1. Water within 30 minutes of installation.
2. Keep sod consistently moist for the first 10 days.
3. Stay off the lawn until it passes the tug test.
4. Do not mow until grass reaches 4 inches.
5. Call us if patches spread, edges lift, water pools, fungus appears, or roots do not hold after 10–14 days.

Quick Tips Checklist

Use this checklist during the first month to stay on track. Check each item as you go.

- ☒ Water within **30 minutes** of installation — don't delay.
- ☒ **Stay off the lawn until it passes the tug test (usually 10–14 days).**
- ☒ **Check soil moisture daily and adjust watering for sprinkler output, soil, weather, and wind.**
- ☒ Water in the **early morning only** (4 AM – 9 AM).
- ☒ Keep **pets and children off** the lawn until roots are fully established.
- ☒ **Don't mow** until grass blades reach 4 inches in height.
- ☒ **Once established, mow weekly and never cut more than one-third of the blade at a time.**
- ☒ Use **sharp mower blades** for the first cut to avoid tearing.
- ☒ Apply **starter fertilizer** around day 10–14 if not pre-applied.
- ☒ Watch for yellowing or brown patches and **act within 24 hours.**
- ☒ **Call Lawn and Yard Solutions early if browning, gaps, fungus, standing water, or rooting problems appear.**

Questions? We're here to help!

☎ (209) 442-3567 | ✉ richard@lawnandyardsolutions.com
Lawn and Yard Solutions — Proudly serving our community