

Lawn watering and other outdoor water uses can account for 30 percent of Illinois home water usage throughout the summer, but only half of that water penetrates the soil, with the rest lost due to inefficient watering practices.

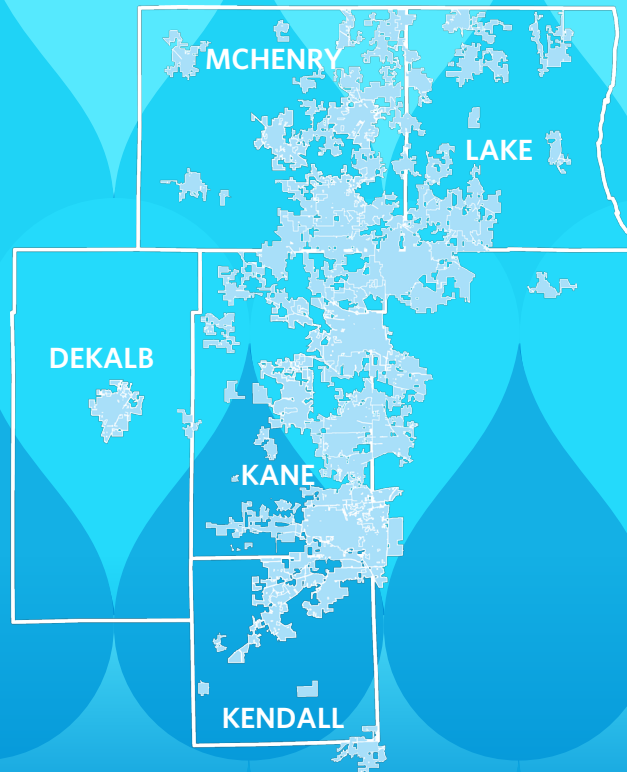
Reducing outdoor water waste in Illinois saves money and protects our limited water resources, especially during times of drought.

We can all take a few simple steps to use water more efficiently.

### Regional Water Supply Concerns

Water conservation is increasingly important in northeastern Illinois as rapid population growth continues. In Kane, DeKalb, McHenry, and Kendall Counties, population increased between 15 percent to over 25 percent between 2000-10. This growth is putting pressure on our rivers and depleting aquifers — layers of underground rock that contain groundwater — faster than they can recharge. In response to these pressures, the Northwest Water Planning Alliance was formed in 2010 to ensure a sustainable water supply.

*By understanding where our water comes from and our conservation needs, we can work together to create a sustainable water supply for future generations.*



### Northwest Water Planning Alliance

The NWPA, formed by intergovernmental agreements, seeks to collaboratively plan for and steward our shared river and groundwater resources to ensure a sustainable water supply for the people, economy, environment, and future generations. This group connects roughly 80 communities in DeKalb, Kane, Kendall, Lake, and McHenry Counties. NWPA communities are located within the same watershed and use shared water resources of groundwater, river or lake water, or a combination.

For more information, visit [www.nwpa.us](http://www.nwpa.us) or [www.lawntogreatlakes.org](http://www.lawntogreatlakes.org).



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# Seed or Sod? Establishing a New Lawn



NORTHWEST  
WATER PLANNING  
ALLIANCE

Metropolitan Planning Council



LAWN TO LAKE

## Background

**Lawn Establishment and Water Use:** Choosing between seed or sod can have an impact on the amount of water needed to establish a new lawn. Reducing outdoor water waste in Illinois saves money and protects our limited water resources, especially during times of drought.

**Sod Production:** The main concern of sod production is the development of the root system and its growth. To accomplish this, large volume irrigation systems are installed to supplement rainfall during initial establishment and during extended dry periods. At 4,840 square yards of sod per acre, up to 1 centimeter of soil can be lost from every harvest.



Image courtesy of Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant.

**Soil Tests and Fertilizers:** Homeowners should consider soil testing in advance of sod or seed installation to determine necessary fertilizers and soil amendments to be added during soil preparation. Once installed, a starter fertilizer should be added to a new lawn. More nitrogen may be needed for sod establishment.

## What Should I Choose?

- **Seed:** Ideal planting time is mid-August to mid-September due to less competition from weeds. Try using multiple species of grass to help adapt to various light, drainage, and traffic conditions on your property. Spread half of the seed across the desired area and then apply the remaining seed perpendicularly to have uniform coverage. Lightly drag a rake over the area to incorporate the seeds. Using mulch or straw as cover helps to keep moisture in during germination.

**Water Requirements:** Water seed right after application using a fine spray. Lightly water 1-2 times a day to keep moisture in the top few inches of soil until germination (about 2-3 weeks). Avoid puddle formation. Once grass has germinated and begun to grow, reduce watering to 2-3 times per week with no more than 1 inch of water per week.

- **Sod:** Ideal planting time is the fall season. Avoid installing during intense heat and low humidity conditions due to sod's intolerance to drought conditions. Prior to purchasing, new sod should be inspected for weeds and disease. Choosing a local grower helps increase rooting success, especially when raised on mineral soil compared to peat. New sod should be aligned with the edges close together and in a staggered, brick laying pattern. After the sod has taken root, core aerating the lawn will help with root development.

**Water Requirements:** Newly laid sod should be thoroughly watered for 30 minutes after installation. Irrigate daily for 10 days to 2 weeks until roots are established. After the sod has developed a new root structure, water thoroughly 2-3 times per week. A thorough watering vs. shallow watering is better for new sod. No more than 1 inch of water per week is necessary.

## Differences

Some grass species take longer to develop from seed. There are fewer grass species available in sod. Rain or irrigation can wash away planted seeds. Sod needs to be planted within 24 hours of being harvested. Weeds are more problematic when establishing seed. Sod is not produced for shady environments.

It is generally accepted that newly established sod and seed need about 1 inch of rain per week during their early life. It is suggested to use a measuring tool such as a tuna can to measure how much water is being used and to prevent over watering of new seed or sod.

**Make sure you follow the guidelines developed by your local water utility when establishing a new lawn.**

For more information, visit the University of Illinois Extension Lawn Talk website: [extension.illinois.edu/lawntalk](http://extension.illinois.edu/lawntalk)



Image courtesy of Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant.