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Growing grass in the shade

The reason turf performs so poorly in shaded areas is because of a lack of sunlight. Grass is like most other plants, it does best with an abundance of sunlight present.

Densely shaded areas are often characterized by:

- 1) Thin, patchy areas of grass
- 2) Bare soil
- 3) Tree roots
- 4) Moss
- 5) A lack of Kentucky Bluegrass



Some varieties of grass perform better in low light situations such as ryegrass and fescues. The most popular and desirable grass in West Michigan is Kentucky Bluegrass. It is a preferred grass and excels in full sun, **but it will not grow in the shade.**

To make matters worse, every year the canopy of your trees grows larger and thicker, making it even more difficult to grow grass beneath them. Unless drastic tree trimming or removal is done, over time, things tend to get worse, not better.

Sodding these areas is not an option.

The primary grass used in sod is Kentucky Bluegrass. Bluegrass will not grow in the shade.

So, what can be done to improve these areas?

- 1) Reseeding. You can reseed with a shady mix of grass seed. This will work especially well in areas that receive a mixture of sun and shade throughout the day. Just remember: you have not improved how much sunlight can reach the ground, so your reseeding results may be short lived.
- 2) Tree Trimming. Trees can be trimmed and their canopies raised and thinned out allowing sunlight to penetrate. After 2 or 3 years, the canopy usually will have filled back in and more trimming will be necessary.
- 3) Bark Mulch and plants. Rather than constantly battling shade, spreading bark mulch around the base of the tree can be a great option. Another idea is to add a shade loving ground cover like pachysandra or ground ivy, or some shade loving plants like hostas.
- 4) Accept the thinner grass and enjoy the trees. Sometimes we need to accept that our trees are a wonderful asset to our properties but aren't going to make for the best conditions to grow grass. We care for many homes that don't have trees, and would love some trees despite the problems they bring.

Make sure you are using proper cultural practices in these areas: Mow the grass at 3 inches or higher and keep these areas properly watered. Reduce compaction with aeration, keep grubs out of the lawn, along with a good fertility program to have the best chance at growing grass in shady areas.