



SOBER'S LAWN CARE SERIES

# *The* **KANSAS** **LAWN HANDBOOK** 2026 EDITION

**A Practical Guide  
to a Healthier, Greener  
Lawn in Kansas**



**SOIL  
& ROOTS**



**NUTRITION  
& FERTILIZATION**



**SEEDING  
& RENOVATION**



**WATERING  
& IRRIGATION**



**MOWING  
& MAINTENANCE**



**WEEDS, PESTS  
& DISEASES**

**BY HOUSTON SOBER**

STRAIGHTFORWARD ADVICE FOR KANSAS LAWNS



CHAPTER 1

# The Lawn Starts Below Ground

HEALTHY SOIL | STRONG ROOTS | BEAUTIFUL RESULTS

*“Healthy soil grows healthy grass.”*





# Great Lawns Start with Great Soil

In Kansas, your soil is the foundation of everything. It stores water, holds nutrients, and supports strong roots. When soil is healthy, grass can handle heat, drought, disease, and everyday stress much better.

Most Kansas lawns are a mix of clay, silt, and sand. That means proper soil management is one of the biggest factors in growing a thick, green lawn.



## A HEALTHY SOIL PROFILE



### Grass Blades

Capture sunlight and produce energy.

### Thatch Layer

Keep this thin (less than ½ inch).

### Root Zone

Most roots grow in the top 4–8 inches.

### Healthy Soil

Holds water, air, and nutrients for stronger grass.

## WHY SOIL HEALTH MATTERS



### BETTER ROOTS

Deeper roots mean a stronger, more drought-tolerant lawn.



### IMPROVED WATER USE

Healthy soil absorbs and holds moisture more efficiently.



### MORE NUTRIENTS

Nutrients stay available longer for steady growth.



### GREENER, THICKER LAWNS

A balanced soil environment produces a denser, more resilient lawn.



## SOBER'S FIELD NOTE

You can't build a great lawn on poor soil. Healthy soil is alive with beneficial organisms that break down organic matter and make nutrients available to your grass. When we take care of the soil, everything above it looks better.



# Test First. Treat Second.

*A soil test replaces guesswork with a plan.*

## TEST THE RIGHT AREA.

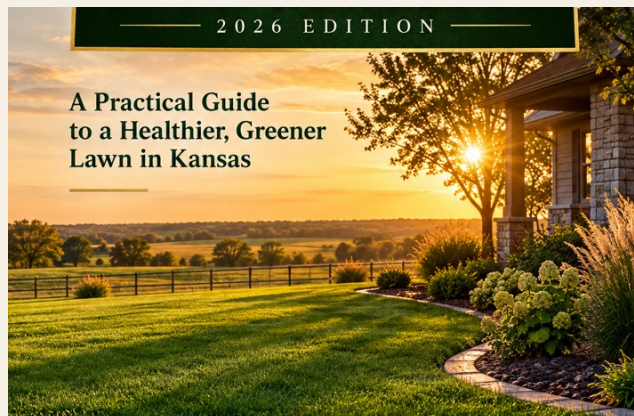
Collect several cores from a representative lawn area and combine them. Keep obviously different or troubled areas separate.

## USE THE REPORT.

Let the results guide phosphorus, potassium, lime or sulfur decisions. Nitrogen management is usually based on turf species and season.

## COMPARE TROUBLE SPOTS.

If one patch struggles while the rest thrives, sample the problem area separately and compare it with healthy turf.



### SOBER'S FIELD NOTE

**Good information first. Products second.**

# Feed the Roots, Not Just the Color.

*The darkest lawn is not always the healthiest lawn.*

## **N — NITROGEN**

Drives color, leaf growth and density. For tall fescue in Kansas, fall is the backbone of the fertility program.

## **P — PHOSPHORUS**

Supports plant energy and rooting. Apply to established turf when soil testing indicates a need.

## **K — POTASSIUM**

Supports stress tolerance and overall plant function. Soil-test recommendations should guide correction.



### **SOBER'S FIELD NOTE**

**FERTILIZER MATH:** Desired pounds of nutrient ÷ decimal nutrient percentage = pounds of product.

# A Better Lawn Starts With Preparation.

*Seed needs soil, moisture and time.*

## SEPTEMBER IS PRIME.

Fall is the preferred window for establishing cool-season turf in Kansas. September gives tall fescue seedlings time to develop before winter.

## CONTACT MATTERS.

Successful overseeding is less about scattering more seed and more about creating real seed-to-soil contact.

## KEEP IT MOIST.

Correct drainage, remove debris, open the surface, distribute seed evenly and keep the seedbed consistently moist through germination.



### SOBER'S FIELD NOTE

**TALL FESCUE:** about 6–8 lb / 1,000 sq ft for new lawns and 3–5 lb for overseeding.

# Measure Water. Don't Guess.

*Minutes on a controller do not tell you how much water reached the roots.*

## **NEW SEED.**

Needs frequent light moisture because the surface dries quickly.

## **ESTABLISHED TURF.**

Needs deeper watering with enough time between cycles for the upper soil to begin drying.

## **CATCH-CAN TEST.**

Place straight-sided containers across a zone, run it for a known time, then compare the amounts. Differences reveal poor distribution.

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### **SOBER'S FIELD NOTE**

**COVERAGE FIRST.** Then decide how long the zone should run.

# Every Cut Changes the Plant.

*Mowing height controls leaf area, root strength and soil shading.*

## **MOW HIGHER.**

K-State spring guidance in the source recommends tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass near the high end of their range — about 3 to 4 inches.

## **KEEP BLADES SHARP.**

Sharp blades leave clean tips. Dull blades shred leaves, create a tan cast and increase stress.

## **DON'T SCALP.**

Removing too much leaf at once reduces photosynthetic area and exposes the soil surface.

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### **SOBER'S FIELD NOTE**

**3–4 INCHES:** an easy number to remember for tall fescue.

# Give the Root Zone Room to Breathe.

*Compaction is a physical problem. Core aeration is a physical solution.*

## CORE AERATION.

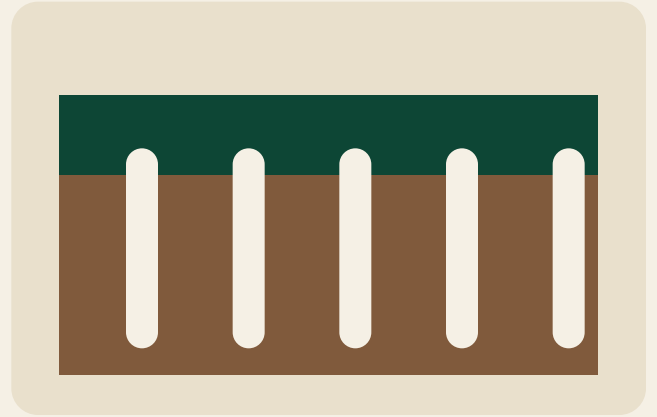
Removing plugs creates temporary channels for air and water and gives roots an easier path through compacted soil.

## WHEN IT FITS.

For cool-season turf, spring or early fall can fit. September pairs especially well with overseeding.

## LOOK FOR THE CLUES.

Hard soil, slow infiltration and thin high-traffic areas are signs worth investigating.



### SOBER'S FIELD NOTE

**AERATION + OVERSEEDING** is a natural fall pairing for compacted cool-season lawns.

# Brown Isn't a Diagnosis.

*It is a clue.*

## 1 — PATTERN

Is the damage circular, irregular, along a sprinkler edge, in traffic lanes or confined to full sun?

## 2 — MOISTURE

Compare the root zone in healthy and damaged turf. Too wet and too dry can look surprisingly similar.

## 3 — IRRIGATION

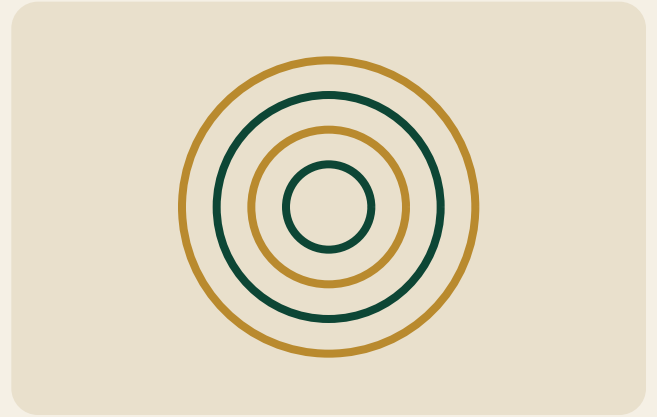
Run the system. Look for tilted heads, blocked spray, clogged nozzles, leaks and weak coverage.

## 4 — PLANT

Inspect blades, crowns and roots for lesions, chewing, discoloration, rot or shallow rooting.

## 5 — HISTORY

Review recent fertilizer, herbicide, mowing, heat, construction, traffic and watering changes.



### SOBER'S FIELD NOTE

**START WITH EVIDENCE.** Treat the cause.

# Work With the Season.

*A practical cool-season framework for Kansas lawns.*

## MAR–APR

Resume mowing. Spot-treat broadleaf weeds when conditions fit. Spring seeding is a second-choice window.

## MAY–JUN

Check irrigation coverage before summer. Avoid forcing excessive cool-season growth as heat builds.

## JUL–AUG

Manage stress. Water intelligently, mow higher and diagnose brown areas before treating.

## SEP

Prime tall-fescue seeding and overseeding window. Aerate compacted soil. Begin fall fertility.

## NOV

Late-fall nitrogen can support root reserves and spring green-up on established tall fescue.



### SOBER'S FIELD NOTE

**SEPTEMBER** is the month to circle for tall-fescue renovation.

# Build the Lawn From the Soil Up.

*Strong roots. Smart timing. Better decisions.*

**KEEP THIS HANDBOOK.**

Use it as a quick reference before reaching for another product.

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**SOBER'S FIELD NOTE**

**Straightforward advice for Kansas lawns.**