

# TURFGRASS SOD PRODUCTION IN IRELAND

## Introduction



*A turfgrass harvester in action.*

Turfgrass sod production is a relatively small and niche business in Ireland. There are approximately a dozen turfgrass producers in the country. Each producer varies in size of production from 4-50ha. Turfgrass sod is

available 12 months of the year. Turfgrass sod producers also supply bark mulch, topsoil and soil conditioners as part of their business. Some provide installation services for both commercial and private clients.

## Turfgrass sod cultivation

Most of the turfgrass sod produced in Ireland is sown with seed sourced from the UK. Large fields are initially cultivated using standard tillage equipment. Well-drained soils are preferable for winter-harvested sod, but

during the summer months these fields may need supplementary irrigation.

The type of seed mixtures sown by producers will depend on the end use of the turfgrass sod or specific client requirements. Turfgrass

### Wildflower turf

Some of the more innovative turfgrass sod producers have begun to diversify into other roll out products.

Wildflower turf products are in their infancy in Ireland but there will be growth in this area in the future. Increased interest in pollinator-friendly planting schemes and naturalised landscapes will boost interest and sales.

Producers prefer to use wildflower seed with Irish provenance where possible; however, it is limited in availability, meaning that seed sourced from abroad is also used.

### Returns from sod production

The retail price of sod averages at €4.00-€4.55 per square metre.

Large quantities will be offered at a discount, with prices in the region of €3.00 per square metre.

If the sod is supplied and laid the price is normally doubled.

On average 75-80% of the area sown is harvestable.

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sod producers use specialised seed mixtures that they have refined with turfgrass seed houses.

Dwarf perennial ryegrass cultivars (*Lolium spp.*) are the most popular and are used for both landscape and sport use. Many growers will also include fescue (*Festuca spp.*) and bentgrass (*Agrostis spp.*) in their fine lawn-grade products. One Irish producer can supply greens-grade annual meadowgrass (*Poa annua L.*) sod in limited quantities.

It takes 18 to 24 months of growing before the turfgrass sod is ready to harvest. In this time the turfgrass will be treated twice with selective herbicides and a fertiliser programme is implemented based on soil analysis. Growers want to create a dense turf sward with a strong root system that holds together when



Grass clippings can be collected with a trailed vacuum system.

harvested. Some producers use a biodegradable netting to reduce the production time required.

Regular mowing of the turfgrass is essential to create a dense sward. All tractors are fitted with floatation tyres to spread the weight of the machinery on the delicate surface. Initially,

the turfgrass is cut with rotary mowers but when sward density increases producers switch over to cylinder mowing for a better finish.

Under strong grass growth conditions, producers may collect the clippings from the sward using a trailed vacuum system behind the tractor.

## Market for turfgrass in Ireland

The market for turfgrass sod is divided into the following areas:

- golf clubs;
- landscape and sports turf contractors (including private lawns); and,
- sports fields.

Golf courses require high-quality turfgrass sod that is free from thatch and weeds when rebuilding or remodelling green complexes, tee boxes, bunkers and pathways. Links golf courses require fine grasses (*Festuca spp.*) for fairways and revetted bunkers grown on sand. This type of turfgrass sod is not produced in Ireland in sufficient quantity. Sportsturf contractors working on links golf courses import turfgrass sod from the UK as a result. The market for high-quality turfgrass sod in Ireland is small and unpredictable, making it very hard for Irish producers to grow enough to make it profitable. Turfgrass sod allows landscapers to create instant lawns for clients and is usually the final stage of a landscape construction build. Using turfgrass sod instead of seed saves the clients six weeks of growing in their lawns. Landscape contractors are high-frequency users of turfgrass sod and their quality requirements are usually less specific than golf courses.



Watering turfgrass can be important depending on the location and time of year. Quantities required will vary from 30 square metres to 10,000 square metres for larger projects.

Sports fields such as GAA, rugby and soccer pitches utilise hard-wearing sports turf for repairs. Typically, goalmouths are levelled and resodded annually. Croke Park stadium has its own sand-based turf farm in north Co. Dublin, which grows sod for pitch renovations after concerts.

### Further information

For further information please contact Eamon Kealy, Teagasc, Kildalton College, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny at:  
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The following resources are also helpful:

- 🌐 <https://summerhilllawns.ie/>
- 🌐 <https://martynlawns.com/lawn-turf/>
- 🌐 <https://www.emeraldawns.ie/>

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