Proper Soil Preparation

1. "Rough grade" the entire area. This serves two purposes. First, you will uncover buried debris that can now be removed from the site. Secondly, if done correctly this will eliminate possible drainage problems. If operating in a larger area that is accessible by machinery, you can use a tractor-mounted blade and/or box to accomplish this rough grade. If operating in smaller areas where tractors aren't necessary or accessible then rough grading can be accomplished with hand tools. You are looking to "rough" up the soils, do not worry about being overly particular during this process as you are mainly attempting to accomplish the two goals set forth above.
2. After your rough grade is finished, you are ready to till the soil up. This should be done at a depth of 4-6 inches. There are many benefits to completing this task ahead of installing sod. The biggest benefit of properly tilling up your site is that it will break up compacted soils. This will help to control most annual weeds and also give you a bonding of both topsoil and subsoil to enable better root penetration and water movement in the future.
3. Fortunately, the Midwest tends to have very nutrient rich soils. However, if this is not your reality, or you would like to enhance your existing soils prior to sod installation, you can incorporate compost or some other type of organic soil into the topsoil.
4. Test the soil pH level. Acidic soils (pH of 6 or below) can be improved by adding lime. The type and amount needed will be determined by the level of acidity in your soils. Alkaline soils (pH of 7.5 and higher) can be improved by adding sulfur or gypsum. Just like in acidic soil correction, the amount and type of material will be based on alkalinity levels. Please contact us, or another turf or garden center for a professional consultation if further guidance is needed.
5. "Finish grade" your site using a tractor mounted box blade if operating in larger areas or small hand tools in smaller areas. Make sure you are following the contours of your rough grade during this process so to keep proper drainage.
6. You are now ready for your new sod. Because you followed proper soil preparations you yard will be better suited for survival. Your product will require less maintenance and smaller quantities of applied water, fertilizer, and pesticides. Following the guidelines above will ensure that this investment in your yard will pay dividends for you long into the future.