Lawn Care

A discussion of the vital problems of lawn making and maintenance

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SHEEP SORREL

Rumex Acetosella

WE feature in this issue a weed which has been more abundant than usual during the past season, probably as a result of the severe drouth of 1930. It will be pointed out later why such a condition might readily bring a sorrel visitation.

SORREL MEANS "SOUR."

Sheep Sorrel is a common weed, being perfectly at home in practically every nook and corner of North America. Other names by which it is sometimes called are Field Sorrel, Horse Sorrel, Red Sorrel, Sour Weed, or simply Sorrel. The word is derived from the German meaning "sour." Reference is made to the sour taste of the leaves and possibly to the juice contained in the stems of the plant. This juice is considered by veterinarians harmful to horses and sheep.

SHEEP SORREL
Rumex acetosella

EASILY RECOGNIZABLE.

The illustration here presented will enable anyone to identify the plant quickly if it is growing in the lawn. Note particularly the shape of the leaves. The plant is a slender perennial with an abundance of creeping root stalks. There are numerous greenish red flowers, rather inconspicuous and certainly not pretty. In May or June a patch of sorrel is readily seen from quite a distance because of the red mass of ripening seed heads. Each plant produces thousands of small triangular seeds about the size of a white clover seed. As a result it is usually in clover that seeds of sorrel are found and from which it is impossible to separate them. Inferior grades of white clover seed are frequently the hiding place for sorrel and doubtless many lawns have been thus infested.

HELPLESS IN GOOD SOILS.

It has been discovered that sorrel is most likely to be found in dry, worn-out and acid soils. This is not because sorrel prefers such soil for, naturally, it grows best in fertile, well-drained soils just as do other plants. In good soils, however, it cannot compete with other plants. Following a season of unusual drouth sorrel may be found in fertile soils but otherwise its presence is a rather good indication of impoverishment and lime deficiency.

HOW TO CONTROL SORREL.

Like most strongly acid plants sorrel

may be killed with chemical sprays. Probably the most satisfactory from the standpoint of safety to the grass is Iron Sulfate (Copperas), the same as used in dandelion control. The proper strength for the spray solution is 1½ pounds of Iron Sulfate to one gallon of water. It may be applied with an ordinary spray pump or even with a watering can if the outlet holes are quite small. Spraying with this solution will prevent seed production. If the plants send out new leaves after the spray has been used a second treatment will finish the job. Spraying is of course most practical when sorrel occurs in patches in an otherwise good stand of grass or when it is growing around rocks or fences. Where not abundant it may be weeded out by hand.

LIME.

Other means of checking sorrel are: fertilizing the grass so it will get the upper hand (sorrel can nearly always be smothered out by a heavy growth of grass) or by applying lime where soils are known to be deficient in it.

Ground limestone, which is the best kind to use, should be applied during the winter when the ground is frozen. Ground limestone is slow acting and needs weathering before it will modify the soil condition. It may be used at the rate of 20 pounds per 1000 square feet. Hydrated lime is quick acting and so not more than 15 pounds per 1000 square feet should be applied. This type is preferable if necessary or advisable to make the application in early spring or fall.

More About Earthworms

"YOU ASKED for contributions of experience on exterminating earthworms. We have had our trouble with earthworms for years in our lawn. We are located on a hill under a heavy oak shade and we have found that Mowrah Meal gives best results."—W. E. SHARP, Chicago, Ill.

Thank you, Mr. Sharp, for giving us the benefit of your experience.

In LAWN CARE for June-July, wherein earthworms were featured, we intentionally omitted the Mowrah Meal remedy because we felt the other "killers" were more easily obtainable. However, to make the worm story complete we add this paragraph:

Mowrah Meal consists of the ground seeds of the madhuca tree of the East Indies. The oil in the seeds is first pressed out. When fresh this meal is a very effective worm killer and may be applied to the grass in a dry condition at the rate of 15 pounds per 1000 square feet. The grass should then be freely watered. Mowrah Meal deteriorates with age especially when stored in a damp place. In such condition it is ineffective. It has the advantage of being comparatively harmless to man and for this reason many people prefer it to poisonous killers.

Fighting Weeds At the Source

A BULLETIN published back in 1911 by the Maryland State Experiment Station contains this very pertinent comment: "The question of pure seed is a very important one in weed control. There is scarcely any agricultural question of more vital importance than the question of good seed; none in which slighter differences can have greater influence upon the result; none in which there is greater opportunity for fraud. Nearly all our bad weeds have been introduced in seeds of various crops, especially in grass and clover seed. Weeds are being carried every year to new localities in this way. One should be on the constant look out, and no seed should be sown without a careful examination for weed seeds."