

# Lawn Care

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O. M. SCOTT & SONS CO. MARYSVILLE, OHIO

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## POA ANNUA

THE chief difficulty in discussing this child of Nature is to know whether to call it a weed or a desirable grass. As its name indicates, *Poa Annua* is an Annual Bluegrass which matures seed inside of a year and then dies. It owes its continued existence to the fact that it is a prolific seeder even when kept closely cut.

The name and fame of *Poa Annua* appear in some publications on turf grasses but it is also listed in the rogue's gallery. Each year scores of samples are received from folks who have chanced upon a patch of it in their lawns and classified it in their minds as a weed. Others send us these specimens and report a beautiful and luxuriant growth in shaded areas where nothing would ever grow before. We are therefore busily engaged in telling one group how to eradicate *Poa Annua* while another is being instructed how to encourage it.

It is probable that *Poa Annua* was brought into this country from Europe in early Colonial times. Printed descriptions of it appear in English publications dating as far back as 1825.

Even then there was considerable difference of opinion as to its value.

*Poa Annua* is one of the few grasses that are found throughout the United States. It even grows in tropical America in high altitudes. In the warmer sections it thrives during the winter months, but dies in summer. Some of our southern golf courses have luxuriant winter fairways composed almost entirely of *Poa Annua*, while in the latitude of Minneapolis it makes up a good percentage of golf course turf during the summer months.



POA ANNUA

### An Abundant Seeder

Like the ever welcome Crocus, bright green patches of *Poa Annua* are among the first harbingers of spring. This grass is frequently in flower before other varieties have even become green. Seed production starts in early spring and continues until hot weather when many of the old plants die. New plants spring up in early fall to continue the seeding cycle until cold weather.

This seeding habit is the principal identifying characteristic of *Poa Annua*. Not only are seeds produced during the

greater part of the year but they develop even when the grass is cut at less than half an inch as it is on golf course putting greens.

### Growth Not Vigorous

The leaves of *Poa Annua* are bright yellow-green in color, making them readily distinguishable from other grasses which have more of a bluish cast. As the seed heads approach maturity the grass becomes paler in appearance. This is due in part to the straw colored seed heads.

Generally speaking, the plants of *Poa Annua* are not vigorous. The blades are soft and the roots are shallow. There is a slight creeping tendency but the rapid spread of *Poa Annua* in certain places is due to its seeding habits rather than its ability to send up new shoots at the stem joints. The seeds from a single plant may be responsible for a patch a foot square in a few months' time.

Since it is such a hearty spring grower it would indicate that *Poa Annua* likes a cool moist condition. This is true. It may be admired for its rich green color and thick sod but it must be mistrusted for its fickleness. As hot weather arrives and good grass is most needed and appreciated, *Poa Annua* is very likely to disappear. Sometimes the first hot blasts of summer will turn it brown or cause a quick and complete fade-out.

### Adapted to Shade

One place where it is apt to survive is in moist, shaded places. In fact, *Poa Annua* is usually at its best in the shade. Many are attracted to it because of that feature. But even in shade it may go away quickly because of its susceptibility to fungus diseases.

*Poa Annua* seed is produced commercially only in Europe. Its availability is irregular depending on harvests and the hazards of ocean traffic.

### What to Do About It

Those who like *Poa Annua* have tried special maintenance methods in an attempt to hold it through hot weather. It is difficult to maintain since the plants never have much reserve strength because of abundant seed production. These efforts have been confined mainly to golf course putting greens where *Poa Annua* is sometimes preferred to other grasses. Frequent topdressing with compost combined with moderate applications of fertilizer will help to keep it. Although moisture loving, *Poa Annua* does better in fairly well drained soils. This is because it affords the shallow roots a plentiful supply of oxygen.

If *Poa Annua* is not wanted it is hard to control when growing under favorable conditions. About the only sure way is to prevent seed production by removing the individual plants in early spring before they start seeding. Even then control will not be complete because of the sprouting of dormant seeds which may have carried over from previous seasons.

Some authorities recommend seeding Creeping Bent into areas infested with *Poa Annua*. While the Bent may not crowd out the *Poa Annua* it will persist during the summer months and provide a good turf in the absence of this temperamental annual variety.

*Poa Annua* can be destroyed by chemicals but other grasses in the area will suffer the same fate. Small patches can be smothered with any material that keeps out light and air.

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