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Lawn Care

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WINTER DROUTH AFFECTS LAWNS

Grass has gone off-color and suffered more damage than usual this winter. The drouth of last fall, which has continued through the winter in most sections, plus the effect of frequent freezes without snow protection, has been responsible for the ugly grayish-brown color.

One feature of a winter drouth is its deceptiveness. Few are conscious of it except professional observers or farmers who are constantly alert to the effect of the elements on their crops. The urban dweller thinks only of drouth as a summer or fall condition and not expectable in winter. The reason is that he sees the soft, wet surface whenever it thaws but what he does not see is the lack of reserve moisture that should be present in the subsoil.

Possibly the drouth will be broken in many sections by the time this is being read. Even so, lawns will have been damaged and the spring lawn program should be planned accordingly. Here are some suggestions that may help alleviate the harmful effects of a winter drouth:

1. Apply Turf Builder as early as possible, preferably while the grass is still dormant. If it has greened up, then be sure the grass is dry. This will avoid burning and will prevent overly quick stimulation. A good supply of food in the soil strengthens grass roots and helps offset a moisture shortage.

2. Make an early seeding to replace those plants that succumbed over the winter. Seed the whole lawn lightly, then give the bare spots an extra amount. Remember, freezing does not harm good seed and it's better to have it in the ground early if possible.

3. If available, topdress with a quarter inch of compost or organic material such as rotted manure or peat moss, mushroom soil or good loam. This will help conserve moisture.

4. When it's time to cut, follow the Scott plan of relatively high cutting (except for Bent grass lawns) particularly as the weather gets warmer. The longer grass acts as a buffer and reduces the loss of moisture by evaporation. Each year more and more LAWN CARE readers report their satisfactory results in following the mowing program outlined in LAWN CARE No. 54.

5. Now that there is not so much time or help available for lawn cutting, the usual LAWN CARE suggestion for disposing of clippings may be due for a modification. To catch the clippings and carry them to the compost pile does require extra effort. If these clippings are allowed to fall to the ground, the lawn won't look as neat for a day or two but there will be some benefit, especially in a dry season. The clippings will form a mulch which reduces evaporation and thus conserves soil moisture. If the clippings make ugly

streaks the appearance can be improved by raking or brushing up the heavy mat and carrying it off. If allowed to dry for a day or so there will be less bulk to handle. During a wet season it is better to remove the clippings lest they mat down and smother some grass plants and harbor disease fungi and spores. Those who have bent lawns should always catch the clippings.

SCIENTIST URGES HIGH CUTTING

Close mowing is one of the chief contributing causes to a poor lawn, declares F. A. Welton of the Ohio Experiment Station. Mr. Welton advises high mowing, preferably 1¼ to 1½ inches.

In grass, as in other leafy plants, growth results from the photosynthetic activity of the leaves. If the leaf area is restricted through close mowing, the amount of this work done in the leaves is reduced, and this reduction affects the plants adversely in various ways. It reduces materially the development of the root system, perhaps one-half or more, and thereby limits the plants in their intake of moisture and nutrients.

It is also a predisposing influence to fungus diseases. Grasses are subject to several of these and the damage is usually much greater in low than in high-cut turf. Close mowing also favors the growth of crabgrass. In two tests at the Ohio Experiment Station, it has been clearly shown that high mowing is unfavorable to the coming in of this pest. In a lawn badly contaminated with broad-leaved weeds, like the Dandelion and the various Plantains, high mowing does not, of course, make for tidiness, but where these weeds are not rampant, there is little detraction in beauty from relatively high mowing, preferably 1¼ to 1½ inches.

The height of cut is regulated by raising or lowering the castings holding the roller and the adjustment to any given height is best made on a level floor and by measuring from it to the bed knife. Unfortunately, some mowers cannot be adjusted to cut high. Sometimes, however, this condition can be overcome by winding something like a small rope around the roller and thus raising the bed knife.

Flooding Out Moles

A recent issue of Parks and Recreation Magazine carried a suggestion for getting rid of moles that had not been previously suggested in LAWN CARE.

The idea was passed on by Harry G. Stanwood, custodian of Union Park, Des Moines, Iowa. Presumably he had first tried the usual methods such as trapping. This is not easy because the moles are smart and will avoid the traps unless they are set just right.

Sometimes the poisonous gas from an automobile exhaust is effective. It can be "piped" into the burrows by using garden hose. Other controls include repellents such as lye, naphthaline, paradichlorobenzene, but they don't always reach the moles.

One of Mr. Stanwood's workmen suggested a try at flooding. Maybe others had tried this before but it was new to us. They took a garden hose, poked it into a run, turned on full pressure and pretty soon up would pop a mole for air. They would smack him down and start after another one. In about a half-hour they had eleven moles.

The presence of moles should serve as a warning to get rid of whatever is attracting them. They are carnivorous and live on grubs and other injurious insects.