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Lawn Care
T.M. REG
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WHERE WEEDS COME FROM

TO DISCUSS weeds properly, they need first to be defined. Probably the simplest definition is: "Any plant growing out of place." Thus a garden plant springing up in the lawn is a weed as is the finest kind of grass in a flower bed.

Dr. E. R. Spencer, author of an excellent book on weeds, says, "Of all the forms of nature, unless it be insects, nothing is so sure to come into one's life as weeds." Some folks feel that in this respect their lives have been full.

The illustration on this page exemplifies the spontaneity and longevity of weeds. The growth is all volunteer, covering a period of a few weeks. Nothing had been added to this good garden soil, which had been under intensive cultivation the previous year.

These volunteer weeds came from seeds in the soil. Obviously the seeds were over a year old. As a matter of fact some of them may have been in the soil for 25 or 50 years. Agricultural research has proven seeds may live in the soil that long or longer. One common example is Crabgrass whose seeds have sprouted after lying dormant in the ground for as long as thirty years. Stirring of the soil brought these weed seeds to the surface where conditions of light, heat, moisture and air released them from their state of dormancy.

Frequent stirring up of the soil is nevertheless recommended procedure if there is time enough in preparation of a new lawn. The weed population can be reduced materially though not elimi-

Photo courtesy The Home Garden

nated completely by fallow cultivation. This means letting the weeds grow short of the seeding stage, then raking, harrowing or discing to kill them.

Even a full season of such treatment will not sprout and kill all weed seeds in the soil. Some seeds are endowed by nature with unusually hard coats that resist entrance of moisture for years. Others require alternate freezing and thawing to break the seed coat.

Farmers tell how certain weeds show up unexpectedly every twelve or fifteen years without rhyme or reason. The same thing has been noticed in turf areas. Even where the soil has not been disturbed, new weeds appear although such growth had been controlled in the lawn the previous year.

Sometimes weeds are introduced and at a high price. Manures, topsoil, native peats, black dirt—any of these will carry a substantial weed seed content just the same as any object will carry germs. Frequently the claim is made that these materials are weedfree because of screening, but this is not true because weed seeds are so tiny that they will slip through any screen that would pass soil particles.

It is possible to sterilize soil to kill weed seeds but it is seldom done because of the great expense involved in heating soil to temperatures of 200 degrees F. and keeping it there for at least a half hour.

There are chemical means of destroying the vitality of weed seeds but they are expensive and the residues may prevent growth of any seed.

Some weed seeds like dandelions and thistles are especially constructed for airborne translocation. Others are carried from one place to another by birds. Still others are transported on shoes and clothing, a means greatly facilitated by the sticky or barbed surfaces which many seeds develop. Thus one weedy area can cause trouble in a whole neighborhood. Groupings of fine, clean lawns are apt to reflect a vigilant attitude on the part of homeowners in not permitting weeds in the neighborhood ever to develop to the stage of producing seeds.

Improperly cleaned grass seed is another source of weed infestation.

Folks sometimes get a discouraging mess, such as shown in the illustration, after they have gone to a lot of trouble to prepare a seedbed, fertilize it and plant grass seed. They naturally wonder why weeds instead of grass.

Several things could have happened. The grass seed may have been covered more than ¼ inch in depth. This retards grass seed germination and gives the weeds a chance to get a head start and smother the young grass.

Or, the grass seed may have started but lost the battle because of competition for food and moisture. Sometimes seed may germinate but the sprouts never see daylight. Fungus diseases such as "damping off" may blight them before or shortly after they break through the covering.

Many of these weeds which "take over" a new lawn, are described as annuals. These generally grow faster and more prolifically as they must mature a crop of seed in a very short time if the species is to survive. Such annuals have extensive spreading root systems, enabling them to get more than their share of moisture when the soil is dry. Others germinate in soil too cool for grass seed germination, while the weed plants themselves grow aggressively in cool, wet weather.

The more desirable grasses are perennial, slower to get started but longer lived. The contrast is not unlike the flower garden. Annuals develop fast and make a showing in a hurry while perennials start slowly and require extra months to reach maturity but each year bring satisfaction in beautiful foliage and flowers.

Some of the more common annual lawn weeds are:

Bur Clover—Not a clover at all but one of the Medicago species. Its leaf closely resembles clover, its blossom is a small yellow head.

Oatgrass—A grass-type weed widely distributed and found in many vacant fields. Its seed head closely resembles that of cultivated oats. Develops in many lawns, often in combination with—

Mouse Barley—Another grass-type weed with coarse blades and a seedhead which has also earned it the descriptive name Farmer's Fox Tail.

Poa Annua—A dwarf grass of bright green color and fine texture but of temporary growth. Produces seeds very close to ground where they escape mowing. A very common pest in golf course putting greens and home lawns.

Crabgrass—Another grass weed of rapid growth. Broad-bladed but difficult to distinguish from desirable grasses in its early stages.

Restem Filaree—An annual or biennial herb with finely cut leaves that form in a rosette close to ground under most lawn conditions.

Many of these grass-like weeds will diminish surprisingly with frequent mowing and their seed production for next year's crop be adequately curtailed. This applies particularly to Oatgrass, the Barleys and Bromegrasses common in lawns newly constructed. Crabgrass, on the other hand must have its low lying stems raked up before mowing. Bur Clover and most of the other broad-leaved weeds can be chemically controlled after the young new grass becomes a little hardened by several mowings.

"I received my first copy of LAWN CARE and for the first time in years I begin to see the solution to many problems that I have had with lawns."—Richvale, Calif.

Fall Program

Admittedly, the flesh is a bit weak for much lawn work while the weather is warm. Then, too, the nicest thing about a lawn is to be able to relax on it. Should the spirit prevail to get off to a good start on the fall lawn program, here are some suggestions:

Fall is a natural seeding time. Many plants ripen and scatter their seed then. It is the safest period in which to invest in a new lawn. It is also a good opportunity to repair summer damage to lawns previously established. The soil is warm and helpful to germination. In some areas, moisture is plentiful or in localities of winter rains, new grass started now will develop strongly and root deeply with the advent of those rains. In either case the new grass will have added time and opportunity to develop strength and vigor before enduring another summer season. All these things are in its favor.

WEEDING

In the case of Crabgrass and Bermuda grass, first thin out the population of these plants by cross raking and cross mowing with the mower set to cut short. Catch the clippings and destroy them.

In the case of broad-leaved weeds such as Dandelions, Plantains, Bur Clover, Daisy and others kill these the easy way with the new chemical controls. Apply as a spray or use the spreader-applied Lawn Food plus Weed Control about two weeks before seeding.

FEEDING

Don't overlook feeding, especially if your lawn has not been fed since

spring. Even application is assured with the use of a handy spreader and this can be done just before seeding. If a soil test has indicated the need for lime, this may be put on at the same time, provided raw ground limestone is used.

Regular feeding is one of the greatest aids to better turf and should be included in every lawn program.

SEEDING

Even good lawns should be overseeded now, the amount of seed to be used depending on the density of the present turf. In many cases only two pounds on each 1000 square feet is ample.

Seeding of bare spots will be more productive if a light covering is placed over the seed. Pulverized peat moss, compost or good screened soil are satisfactory. Loosening the soil and working the seed into it is preferable but not always easy to do with a compact surface. Whatever the covering, it should not be over ¼ inch deep. Quite a few seeding failures are attributable to too deep covering.

Keep in mind that sprouting grass needs moisture constantly so frequent sprinkling is important.

SIRS:

Received the book of current issues of LAWN CARE plus the digest issues. I possess a collection of books on things that grow which cost me over $150. Consider the book you sent me of more value to me than any one of the issues I have purchased, one of which cost $20. Many thanks and I appreciate your co-operation.

IRVING E. CLARKE
Rochester, N. Y. Nurseryman

How Do You Fight This Lawn Weed?

LAWN CARE and its thousands of western readers would like to learn what successful methods you have used to control this common lawn weed which seems resistant to the new weed controls. Yellow Oxalis and Purple Oxalis are perennial herbs of the wood sorrel family, have a sour taste in their leaves. Often confused with Bur Clover. If you have succeeded in eliminating or even retarding this weed, others will appreciate knowing how you did it. Just address Scotts Lawn Care, Palo Alto, California.

We've Come of Age

E. H. Earle of Verona, New Jersey, writes that three generations of Earles are now using SCOTTS products. The father set the pace with a SCOTT lawn; his son at Bloomfield, New Jersey, followed suit, and now a grandson at Washington C. H., Ohio, is in the running. Nothing like setting a good example. . . . Speaking of age, we imagine the oldest LAWN CARE reader is still Mr. Robert M. Rownd, Civil War veteran living at Ripley, New York. On October 22, Mr. Rownd should be 105 if we've counted correctly. When he began to read LAWN CARE, Mr. Rownd was a mere boy of 85 . . . which should set a good example for Mr. J. B. Chaney of Colbert, Washington, who writes: "Probably I would have built up a strong resistance to it, if I had been exposed to LAWN CARE about the time I was having mumps, measles and whooping cough. But to be attacked in my seventieth year, I find it tough. May I continue to receive your bulletins as I read them thoroughly and find them most interesting? Hope I'm not too old to learn."