

# BETTER LAWN

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*Harvests*

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## PART I

### THE LAWN INSTITUTE COMES OF AGE

Robert W. Schery  
Director

(As presented to Lawn Institute Annual Meeting, Kansas City, May 9, 1959)

It is unusually pleasant to greet the membership this year, since we look back upon a year of substantial progress. I believe that the Lawn Institute has become of age. It is receiving professional recognition on many fronts. In many ways it is spokesman for fine lawns and for quality lawn seed. It has received acceptance in scientific circles, with industry, among the educational groups and on various public relations fronts. We have been invited on many occasions to contribute both to technical publications and the popular gardening press. We have met with agronomy, horticultural, weed control, and numerous gardening societies; also, on the lighter side, with such as the Williamsburg Symposium, and several radio and TV interviews. Your Director's election as Chairman of the Lawn & Turfgrass Division of the A.S.T.A. has been most helpful in keeping us stage-center nationally.

Nor is it only these positive accomplishments which involve the Institute. Forstalling happenings that might not augur well for better lawns and finer turfs, is also part of the picture. For example, one national gardening book, formerly edited from a restricted viewpoint, mentioned as worthwhile but a single variety of grass - with all maintenance dedicated to this alone. When such weakness was pointed out, your Director was asked to rewrite this chapter - and we now have every expectation that proper acclaim will accrue to the more voluminous fine turfgrasses (even though the Institute's name will not appear, save in credit for a few photos). As designer of an outline for an Agricultural Yearbook on seeds, it was similarly possible to see that lawn seeds were not overlooked in the larger pattern of agricultural and horticultural happenings.

In summarization of the year's experience I will attempt to categorize activities under four headings, realizing, of course, that there must of necessity be overlap. These are: (1) Source of Institute Strength, (2) Seeking New Opportunities, (3) Turning out the Program, (4) Putting the Story Across.

## SOURCE OF INSTITUTE STRENGTH

There are many factors that build strength into an organization, not the least of which are devoted, responsible officers such as mastermind the Lawn Institute, and the necessary financial sinews. These practical considerations will be considered later by your President.

Here I want to emphasize the strength that lies in authoritativeness and comprehensiveness. As I have mentioned in previous years, no institution can successfully live a lie. If we profess to represent better lawns and turf, we must understand and promote better turfgrass. People are concerned with the end result - a good lawn - and with the total requirements for achieving a good lawn.

Obviously this means that our Institute must maintain up-to-the-minute contact with research centers, and with the literature in the field. This in itself could keep an individual occupied, and some day we might hope for affluence enough to engage a specialist for this purpose. Fortunately, our contacts built through the years have been soundly conceived, so that we are welcomed as a co-equal, not as an exploiter or promoter. We are thus voluntarily provided information which might otherwise require an elaborate and expensive research organization to obtain. Again, we might hope for sufficient affluence in the years ahead, to help sponsor research at selected centers, and participate even more fully in the research findings.

Additionally, the Institute must have first hand experience, and do certain things for itself. One can speak and write with authority only when one has experienced a procedure, - is cognizant of the handling of materials and equipment and of the practical pit-falls. Thus our limited trial and demonstration grounds, maintained less elaborately than we would like with part time labor, is more than justified. It does provide the opportunity to witness and photograph, - to say "the Institute has found ---." At the moment our demonstration area is entirely established bluegrass on "borrowed" property. As time goes on this should be elaborated upon to include newly planted and differently managed areas, in order to "dig up dirt" on the varieties and products which will flood the market in coming years.

We have had the good fortune to be associated with Seed Technology, whereby trained analysts and germinating equipment are nearby. Joint research has produced technical publications in a number of fields. We have shown, for example, the breaking point between "adequacy" and "inadequacy" in light vs. heavy bluegrass; in comparing area with area; in comparing regional ecotypes. We have been able to develop information on rapidity of germination, involving different treatments of seed (pre-soaking). We have been able to illustrate the inequitableness of the climax concept in certain instances. We have looked into minimum germination temperatures, - even so remote a project as the influence upon bluegrass seed of passage through an avian digestive tract. There has been some library research too, such as upon the historical aspects of bluegrass and lawns.

## SEEKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Institute activities are not only in depth, but in breadth as well. We have spilled over into the field of fine lawngrass for roadsides. An excellent booklet has been published through A.S.T.A.; and as you will hear from Mr. Beavers, several mailings have been made to highway departments recommending improved specifications to include more bluegrass and Oregon fescue. A few years ago the high price of these grasses resulted in their cancellation from many specifications; it is always hard to push through the red tape for revised specifications (there is usually a two year lag in specs any way). Your Director has been speaker to American Road Builders Association Conventions, speaker and co-host at Ohio Short Course (national gathering of highway landscape men), and has contributed to periodicals in the field.

Another opportunity being explored in the use of bluegrass as a "winter grass" in southern lawns. Trial samples were sent to southern research areas this last autumn.

The advantages of bluegrass (and lawn fescues) have been emphasized for certain specialty uses. Their summer dormancy restricts demands for water at the same time need is greatest for orchard trees; bluegrass should be a "natural" for orchard cover in hilly country. An article to this effect will appear in the American Fruit Grower. The bluegrass-lawn fescue seasonal cycle is such as to complement nicely the growing of summer flowers. We have an article soon to appear in the American Rose Grower magazine, emphasizing this compatibility, and stressing that for a rose garden a bluegrass lawn is not the most attractive setting, but also the most practical.

We have expanded horizontally in many other respects too. Our services have been offered to new Associate members, of which more will be said later. And we have gone beyond the seed industry. Toro (lawn mowers) has been most cooperative in furnishing equipment, even flying into Marysville from Minneapolis their newest mower for the movie. Chemical houses, such as Linck and Velsicol, have supplied both equipment and materials. Universal Metal Products Company has sent us a sprayer. Linck and Toro have footed the bill for press release photographs mailed with our spring kit. Spencer Chemical has not only furnished free experimental material, but quoted the Institute widely in paid advertisements in U.S. News & World Report, and House & Home. Northrup-King, Scotts, Bemis, Upjohn, Malinckrodt, Dow, Barber, Luminal, Kendall Mills, Great Lakes Yeast, International Minerals, Minnesota Mining, Troy Mills, and others have contributed materials.

Then there has also been an enlargement of our liaison efforts. The Executive Secretaries of the Agronomy Society & of A.S.T.A. have referred requests to us. We have been called upon by parks and recreation groups for information. We continue active in the Horticultural Congress, and as a member of the National Horticultural Society. We have been interviewed by a correspondent from Time Magazine (and written up in the business

column of the Columbus Citizen). We have corresponded with editors of Reader's Digest and Life. CBS in New York has telephoned for materials.

In technical circles we have supplied information on lawns to the New York Botanical Garden, and appeared in print in their Journal. We have covered lawns for the Plants & Gardens Handbook, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, soon to appear. Manuscript for a book on lawns has been turned over to Macmillan, for publication in the spring of 1960. An agreement was made to co-author with Bill Daniel of Purdue, a text book for teaching turfgrass. We have supplied the basic outline for a USDA Agricultural Yearbook on Seeds. And we have supplied documentation for lawngrass display at the Rotterdam international exhibit. These and other activities are spreading Institute influence widely.

### TURNING OUT THE PROGRAM

If previous headings might be likened to research and development, this section looks to production; - how the information is ground out, and how the wheels are kept turning.

Perhaps our most spectacular success comes through publication of articles in various magazines and the trade press. Usually we secure reprints of these, which are supplied in small quantities free of charge, or in larger quantities at cost, to organizations wishing to further distribute the story. Some of these we include in our own mailings to editors. We are happy that most articles seem to receive considerable favor, and some are reprinted a second time in merchandising publications. Several seed companies have requested reprints, including Michael-Leonard, Oliger, Twin City Seed, Lee Patten Seed, Ferry-Morse, L. Teweles, McCullough, & Miracle Green. Reprints may also be distributed to garden clubs, or handed out when making personal appearances. We have supplied the Smith Agricultural Chemical Company with four different reprints for use of their speakers. Reprints also make a handy enclosure in answering correspondence.

The Associate members themselves are a formidable means of enhancing the Institute program. These are the advertisers, the prominent names reaching the consuming public. Merely having their support and sponsorship is a boon. Moreover, in the exchange of information, many good ideas are developed. Your President, a little later in the program, will dwell upon a suggestion for further liaison with the Associate members, as has been discussed with Bill Ward. It is my hope that our Associate members can be induced to further call upon us for discussion, materials and for presentations to the public. Already we have supplied, in addition to reprints, slide materials, photos and loan of the movie. Possibilities for working through Associate members would seem almost limitless.

Other "production" efforts of wide utility are the preparation of slides and photographs. Slides are in demand for public appearances (we have loaned to Burpee, Shell Chemical, Horticulture, Encyclopedia Britannica), and we receive requests from newspapers and magazines for photographs. For example, the Providence Journal has requested materials from us, and sent us the Sunday supplement where these were used. The Boston Traveler and Detroit Times similarly asked for help. We have supplied illustrations for many lawn booklets and magazines, such as Popular Mechanics and Better Homes and Gardens.

Grinding out of letters is no small part of our mechanics of operation. Nor are regular mailings to our national board of Advisors. As this becomes more voluminous, the Marysville office certainly should secure a duplicating machine. A wide array of correspondence is received: Quotes from a few letters might be of interest. We have had inquiries even from Australia and Europe, and many states or provinces in this hemisphere.

From Wisconsin: "Your most recent publication "Latest public information on better lawns" is excellent. Will you please send a copy of it to our regional men who are as follows."

From Massachusetts: "Material from the Better Lawn & Turf Institute has been distributed to the Home Horticulture Agents in the various counties of Massachusetts. I can assure you that this material will be of tremendous value to these horticulture agents in their extension programs. I wish to thank you for making this material available to us, for I know of no other source of such fine material to fit into our statewide program of better lawns."

From Perth, Australia: "We have read with interest your article relative to weeds in lawns, and wonder whether you could advise us the best preparation to date, for the control of crabgrass."

From Westchester County, N. Y.: "I believe you can help me. I am designing the cover for the Annual Dinner Journal of the Westchester County Democratic Committee."

We thus advise on planting lawns in North, South, East and West. We deflate "Mondo grass", and call for calmness when consumers reach for miracles.

Another mechanism for getting good information out is through invited speakers or representatives. Your Director, in arranging Lawn & Turfgrass Division programs for the A.S.T.A., has had the good fortune of securing outstanding speakers to appear before the membership. This, and encouragement of good booklets (as that put out by Colorado State University) command the respect of a significant audience. Certainly our own booklets, including "Quality Turfgrass" (now being reprinted) have been highly commended.

## PUTTING THE STORY ACROSS

Putting our product - information - on the market has involved the use of many media. The eleven display boards which Mr. Beavers has prepared show the volume of this contact. I have mentioned the many gardening articles, reprints of which are displayed on one. You also see on display many newspaper clippings and references acquired by our clipping service, radio and television scripts, seasonal press kits, photographic and art services, direct advertising, etc. Mr. Beavers will dwell upon these at greater length in a moment.

As opportunity permits we like to make personal appearances. This enables us to assess public sentiment, as well as carry our message to the people. Public appearances also facilitate distribution of printed materials, and of carry-home reminders such as the seed samples now available.

The new movie, which you will see shortly, is another means of reaching large audiences economically. Mr. Beavers will explain to you the mechanics of distribution, and the potential audience to be reached.

We also like to work through key contacts, such as the researchers at the experiment stations and advisors. In Massachusetts, for example, so close and effective has been our liaison that each county agent is receiving our materials through the University, as basic indoctrination for lawn making recommendations in his county. Very much akin to this has been our close cooperation with other university-sponsored programs; at the University of Missouri this summer your Director appeared with Dr. Hibbard on a TV interview program.

Whenever possible television and radio appearances are sought. One of the most effective coverages of this sort was during the appearance with the national Men's Garden Club Convention in Cleveland; David Burpee and I appeared on two television and several radio spots within a 2 day period, some of them recorded for repeated replay.

Mr. Beavers will have more to say about issuance of press kits to editors, and various press releases to the news services. Apparently these are widely picked up. Membership in the Garden Writers Association & committee chairmanship there, results in personal acquaintance and mailing list reception of a number of valuable contacts.

We continue to cooperate in every way possible with professional and amateur groups interested in lawns and turfgrass. I think our work with Colorado State University has been especially rewarding; all of you have received a complimentary copy of their bulletin "Lawn Care", in which bluegrass is recommended in the headline on the very first page. We are more than happy to encourage wide distribution of this fine booklet.

Mr. Beavers will tell you about some of the proposed approaches for our future. These include continuing use of present methods, plus hope for resources to complete several brochures and a cartoon series. We hope that through the good offices of the members, commending us to their customers (often Associate members), that we will be called upon for presentations and public contact to an ever greater degree.

Thus, while there are difficult problems ahead, and broader financing needed, I do look forward to the future of your Institute with great optimism.

PART 2

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING . . . ABOUT THE INSTITUTE AND KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS

"...This grass contributes significantly to nearly 100 million acres of humid pasture in the United States and is considered the most important introduced grass in North America."

(Phillips Petroleum Manual No. 5 -- "Introduced Grasses and Legumes", page 25)

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"Kentucky bluegrass is the 'Old Faithful' of the grass kingdom. It best fits the needs for the 'average' lawn. With modern fertilization and high mowing (2 to 2-1/2 inches) it will make a satisfactory lawn with little effort. One of the red fescues, such as creeping red or chewings may be used in mixture with bluegrass."

(Dr. Davis, "Which Grass for Your Lawn", page 59, July-August, 1958, Ohio Farm & Home Research.)

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"Large scale planting is still going on from Birmingham, Atlanta, and Charlotte northward, where mixtures of bluegrass, bents and fescues are used."

"Fertilize lawns now to promote growth of Dichondra and cool weather grasses like Kentucky bluegrass . . . "

(Popular Gardening, October, 1958)

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"It is my intention to supply each of our Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, General Managers, and Division Engineers with a copy of this publication ("New Ideas in Roadside Turf"), together with a letter urging them to consider grass seed down cuts and fills on the Union Pacific right-of-way."

(Letter from Joe W. Jarvis, Supervisor of Livestock & Agriculture for Union Pacific Railroad Company, Omaha, Nebraska)

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"Permanent Lawngrasses are perennials that last for years if growing conditions meet their requirement. If your lawn dies out periodically, you may be sure that the conditions are not to the liking of the grasses sown. Don't blame it all on the seed. Instead investigate the soil conditions. Kentucky bluegrass, for example, usually the mainstay in a quality lawn seed mixture, will live indefinitely and will spread by underground stems called stolons to make a thick, dense turf. It is rugged and durable so it is used on football fields, golf course fairways, grass tennis courts and other places that get heavy traffic. Other quality turf grasses have similar quality traits, such as fine textured red fescue, noted for doing well on poor soils and in shade. These two combined make the finest and toughest kind of lawn."

(Horticultural Newsletter, October 27, 1958)

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"The selection of the correct grass or grass mixture is one of the basic steps in the establishment of a lawn. Lawn seed should be purchased according to your needs and with considerable discrimination. Turfgrass species vary in their ability to meet shade, moisture, fertility and soil acidity conditions. Certain grasses are considered permanent and others will persist only for a period of one or several seasons. The use, then, of unadapted species may lead to failure and the necessity for starting a new lawn in a relatively short time. It never pays to "economize" and buy seed by price only, as the mixture that costs least per pound is frequently the most expensive over the years.

"Kentucky bluegrasses are durable and are the predominant lawn species in this area. They should be included in most lawn mixtures."

(Dr. C. Richard Skogley and Dr. Ralph E. Engel, New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station, Rutgers)

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"Your land grant college is always a source of information. Also, industry has excellent publications. For example, the Better Lawn and Turf Institute and its able Director, Dr. Robert W. Schery, provide extensive material."

(Larry Groves of the Better Homes & Gardens, page 76 of the 1958 Turf Conference Proceedings, Midwest Regional Turf Foundation, Purdue University)

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"Grazing Hurts Yield of Bluegrass Seed

Production of bluegrass seed was the highest when the bluegrass was grazed the previous year until December 1. Lowest yields were produced when the bluegrass was not grazed at all. Grazing from the previous harvest through April 1 of the following spring gave intermediate yields.

According to the experimenter who reported the above findings, Robert Buckner, of the University of Kentucky, pasturing stimulates production of seedheads regardless of length of grazing period. However, continuous grazing from seed harvest to the following May does have some adverse effect. The yields were 150 pounds per acre for plots grazed only in the previous summer and fall, 132 pounds per acre on the areas grazed through until April and 50 pounds per acre on the ungrazed field.

Potash and phosphorus levels were kept at a high level. The best nitrogen treatment was 30 pounds per acre in December and again in March. Second best nitrogen treatment was 66 pounds in March. He recommends, however, 30 pounds of nitrogen per acre in the spring if only one application can be given, because too much nitrogen tends to make the bluegrass lodge and reduce yields."

(December, 1958 issue of Crops & Soils)

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"Good grasses like bluegrass, bent, fescue have small seeds -- Ryegrass has only 300,000 seeds per pound..."

(E. F. Steffek, Editor, Popular Gardening, page 67, March, 1959 issue)

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