

Lawn Care

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

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COMPOST FOR TOPDRESSING

EVERY golf course that makes any pretense of having good greens keeps a supply of compost for use in topdressing them several times during the year. The purpose of this treatment is to maintain an even surface by working this material into the low, uneven places, and to provide a surface of new soil for the grass roots, as well as a good cover for seed.

Compost is an intimate mixture of humus-forming materials with soil and sand. After mixing, it is allowed to decompose for a period of time so that weed seeds are destroyed and the number of friendly soil bacteria increased. A good compost, containing a liberal quantity of organic matter, is not only favorable for the multiplication of bacteria, which liberate plant food to grass, but also promotes aeration of the soil.

Making Compost

The humus-forming materials for a compost pile may consist of animal manures, peat moss, or other partially decayed vegetable matter.

The actual compost pile is built up in alternate layers of soil, manure or substitute organic materials and sand. The proportions will vary according to the quality of soil used in the pile. If it is a good garden loam equal parts of soil and manure with one-fourth part coarse sand should give good results. If the soil tends toward a heavy clay as much as two parts manure and one part sand may be necessary. With real sandy soils, ordinary clay should be substi-

tuted for sand and two parts of manure used to one of the native soil.

As the alternate layers are being placed commercial fertilizer should be mixed into the mass, using about one-half pound to the cubic yard.

One Year Needed

A compost pile may be built up of 8 or 10 layers of these various materials. It should be kept moist, and turned over every two or three months. This aids the decomposition process and insures a complete mixture of soil and organic matter. At least a year is needed for thorough decomposition and destruction of weed seeds. This latter is most important as weed seeds are plentiful in the materials used for compost.

After the compost is ready it should be screened through a quarter inch mesh screen following which it is ready for use as a topdressing material. The coarse material should be saved and incorporated into the next pile. If possible a new compost pile should be started every year so that a continuous supply of topdressing is available.

Distributing Topdressing

Probably the easiest way to topdress a lawn, without purchasing special equipment, is to dump the material in small piles and then spread it out over the turf using the back of an iron rake. It can be worked down into the turf with the same implement or with a stiff push broom. Sometimes a flexible metal door mat is used, being dragged

at the end of a rope. For the average lawn, topdressing should be at least one-fourth inch deep. If the surface is very uneven as much as a half inch can be applied without smothering the grass. One cubic yard of compost is needed to add one-third inch of topdressing to 1000 square feet.

Seeding and Fertilizing

Seeding the lawn before topdressing is an excellent practice. The compost makes a fine covering and bed for the seed but care must be taken not to bury the seed too deeply. Because of this danger many people prefer to sow the seed after topdressing. A lawn can also be fertilized at the same time by mixing the proper amount of commercial plant food into the topdressing material. Mixing should be thorough.

Use of Leaves in Compost

While it is possible to incorporate manures and peat directly into the compost pile, leaves or other decomposed matter should be allowed to rot at least a year. These materials should be placed where they will be kept moist at all times and stirred occasionally. Decomposition will be faster if a mineral fertilizer such as ammonium sulphate is incorporated into the mass at the rate of about one pound to every cubic yard of composting material. A sprinkling of lime is also beneficial.

Leaf Mold for Shady Lawns

One of our good friends at Charleston, West Virginia, Mr. T. B. Linna-man, writes:

"After sowing seed early in the spring I applied leaf mold as topdressing and it did the trick. It is the finest thing in the world for shady lawns. All leaves should be raked off the lawn in the fall,

stacked and allowed to rot; then this leaf mold can be applied early in the spring."

Winter Drouth and Its Effect on Grass

What no plant can stand, winter or summer, is drying out, and that is the great winter problem of growing plants. They can resist cold but not drouth. We lose sight of the fact that very dry weather frequently occurs in winter, because we do not have the indicators of drouth familiar to summer: wilting leaves, clouds of dust, and uncomfortable thirst in our own throats. But these winter drouths are very real and so severe that even objects that are frozen solid lose measurable quantities of water through evaporation.

When plants are protected by a blanket of snow, the little atmosphere that is left around them under the snow-bank is nearly saturated and of course the winds are completely blocked off. The falling of snow also means that the air has more moisture in it than it has in open winter, so the air is less thirsty and even the buds on the trees are not subjected to such violent demands for water. While a blanket of snow protects grass in other ways also its greatest service is this function of conserving the scanty winter supply of water.

In the light of these facts it appears that grass which looks hopelessly "whipped" after an open winter may simply be suffering from an inadequate water supply rather than from cold weather. There isn't much we can do about this except possibly to fertilize our lawns in the fall, get the grass in healthy, vigorous condition, and then let it grow long without mowing in the month of October.

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