

Lawn Care

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

PUBLISHED IN FEBRUARY, MARCH, APRIL, AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER BY
O. M. SCOTT & SONS CO., MARYSVILLE, OHIO

August 1939

TWELFTH YEAR

Number 56

TAKE A TIP FROM NATURE SEED YOUR LAWN THIS FALL

FOR OVER a hundred years, turf experts have advised home-owners that fall is the best time to sow grass seed. The garden press has faithfully expressed its approval but the public has not responded with enthusiasm to this advice. About five pounds of grass seed are sown each spring for every pound sown in the fall. Man has seen fit to reverse Nature's process.

Possibly one reason for fall planting's lack of popularity is the prevailing idea that winter is very hard on young grass. Actually grass can endure cold weather with little injury. Its real enemies are extreme heat, drouth, and weeds, and these handicaps are more easily overcome if grass is sown in the fall. Convincing evidence is the fact that the most ardent enthusiasts of fall planting are school and golf course officials with extensive turf areas and large investments to protect.

Why Fall Seeding is Beneficial

Fall weather is nearly ideal for quick germination and the subsequent development of grass. The seeds lodge in warm soil, there is a helpful temperature variation in the warm days and cool nights, and further there is usually adequate rainfall. Autumn rains are gentle and the soil is able to absorb them so there is less washing and drowning of seedlings. These favorable conditions offer every encouragement to a deep and sturdy root development.

While fall is an ideal growing season for grass, it is one of inactivity for most

weeds. Annual weeds have passed their maturity and are rapidly dying. Many perennial weeds are becoming dormant. Competition from this source is at a minimum. Another good reason for fall sowing is that soils work more easily then. They are usually crumbly and thus easy to loosen and pulverize.

When to Seed

Fortunately the fall seeding time extends over a long period. Except in the extreme north, it is safe to sow any time after the heavy evening dews begin which is usually around August 15 in the northern part of the country. The time becomes progressively later southward. The first half of September is best for that section from New York west to Omaha and from the District of Columbia west to Kansas City.

In most years conditions continue favorable through September and even into October. Plantings made in the latter part of the season may not make much headway before winter but will ordinarily carry through and start off vigorously early in the spring.

Fall Seeding of a New Lawn

When the problem of planting is one of a new lawn, the condition of the soil should receive first consideration. It is most difficult to build and keep a nice lawn on sticky clay soil or on extremely sandy soil. Most soils need humus to improve their mechanical condition. This can be supplied by incorporating liberal quantities of organic

matter as suggested in the booklet *Good Lawns*.

In localities where grubs are especially prevalent the lawn can be protected by mixing Lead Arsenate into the upper two inches of soil as suggested in the March 1937 issue of *Lawn Care*. It is also well to consider the possible need for lime to correct extreme acidity. The facts about liming acid soils are contained in *Lawn Care* February 1938.

Much of a new lawn's success depends on planning and the most important feature of that plan is the date of seeding. Results will be much better if the program gets under way well in advance of the seeding date. There will then be time to improve the soil both chemically and mechanically, to kill weed seeds by frequent cultivation and to aerate the soil. However, over-cultivation in dry seasons must be avoided or a dust mulch is formed and the seed may be washed too deeply into the soil during the first heavy rain.

Careful grading will provide pleasing slopes and also good surface drainage of surplus water. There should be no depressions where water will stand and injure grass roots. (See *Good Lawns*, pages 14 to 16.)

A liberal supply of the right turf food in the soil encourages a quick and sturdy growth of grass. This food should be applied to the surface and raked into the upper 2 or 3 inches. It is possible to seed immediately afterward if a food is selected which is mainly of organic origin so there is no danger of burning.

Fall Seeding of an Old Lawn

Fall is also the best time to renovate old lawns. If an established lawn is so poor that reconstruction seems necessary, the first step is to find out the cause of failure and guard against a repetition of the experience. Even a good lawn will be better the next year

if it is seeded and fed in the fall. A good turf will not need drastic treatment but it is advisable to rake vigorously to scratch the surface soil and to mow closely. This permits the seed to reach the soil.

Troublesome weeds should be eliminated as suggested in the various *Lawn Care* bulletins. The large, broad-leaved weeds are best cut out or killed with a few drops of crude acid.

In the case of Crabgrass infested lawns, it is necessary to institute a drastic mowing and raking program. This should start early in August just as soon as the Crabgrass plants start to send out seed-bearing spikelets. These develop very close to the ground and under the vegetation so it is necessary to look carefully for them. Unless they are removed, seeds will mature and fall to the ground, causing a worse infestation the following year.

In controlling Crabgrass, it is necessary to use a heavy, sharp rake to bring the seeding spikes into an upright position. They should then be cut off by mowing in a direction opposite to the raking and the clippings caught and destroyed. This treatment must be made in several different directions, and rather frequently until about the last of August when Crabgrass becomes dormant. A complete discussion of Crabgrass control appears in *Lawn Care*, April 1935.

If the lawn surface is uneven, it is well to level it with a topdressing of compost or good topsoil. Depressions in a lawn should be corrected in this way and not by heavy rolling.

Before sowing the seed, the grass should be fed, with a special turf food, applied when the grass is perfectly dry. A better job can be done with a special fertilizer spreader. If the weather is still warm, the fertilizer may be washed in with the hose.

Seeding in two directions insures even coverage. A light raking and roll-

ing afterwards will firm the soil around all sides of the seed.

Subsequent Treatment

There is no reason to worry about a fall seeding if the weather continues dry and warm. Good seed will not be harmed if it lies dormant in the soil for several weeks.

Sprinkling a new fall seeding is not necessary but if water is once applied and germination started, the soil should be kept constantly moist by watering several times a day with a fine spray. A daily heavy watering is not enough because the surface soil dries too rapidly in bright sunshine or a brisk wind.

Sprouting grass must be kept constantly moist for two reasons. The first is to prevent the formation of a soil crust which the tender grass blades cannot penetrate. The second is to provide moisture to keep the plants alive. Although a severe drying is not injurious to the seed, it is fatal to grass plants after the first leaf emerges.

If an old lawn has been seeded in the fall, it is a good idea to cut it regularly and rather closely through September to give the new grass a chance to receive sunlight. There is not much danger of injuring the young grass unless the soil is very wet at the time of mowing. After the end of September, raise the height of cut to a minimum of 2 inches so there will be a fairly long growth in event of a sudden cold snap.

It is not necessary to mow a newly built lawn unless the grass attains a growth of 2 inches or more and is in danger of toppling over. Then cutting is required to avoid the grass smothering itself in patches either in the late fall or in the early spring before it is possible to start mowing. Always use a sharp, well adjusted mower that cuts the grass cleanly instead of chewing or pulling it off. Cut at a 2 inch height and use the catcher if practicable.

Leaves should be removed regularly from any lawn and particularly from a

new lawn. There is little injury from walking over the lawn and raking but there can be much injury from leaves that are beaten down by the rain so they mat against the ground and smother the grass beneath.

The only winter protection needed is to guard against trespassers. This is especially important when the grass is frosted and the soil not frozen. Footsteps on a lawn at such a time will be evident for many months afterward.

It is not advisable to use a winter mulch covering such as straw, leaves or brush. These materials are apt to do more harm than good by matting and smothering the grass.

Best Time Under All Conditions

Early fall is the ideal time to seed a lawn that is shaded by trees. The grass gets a good start during September while the leaves are still on the trees. After the leaves begin to fall in October, the grass will be benefited by the additional sunlight it receives. There will also be several weeks in early spring when it can grow vigorously before the trees come out in leaf.

The question is often asked as to how late in the fall it is safe to seed. The answer seems to be just as late as the ground can be prepared and the seed sown. Any seed sown much after early October north of the Mason-Dixon Line is not apt to germinate before cold weather but it will lie dormant in the soil until spring. Then it will develop into grass more rapidly than if seeding were delayed until spring.

This practice of dormant seeding is being more widely used each year by school and college officials to repair the damage to football fields. They follow a definite program of fertilizing, seeding and rolling just as soon as the last game is played. Their results prove to the home owner the wisdom of seeding in early winter if he can not get it done before.

Nature sets a good example when she sows most of her seeds in late summer or early fall. It is also the season when plants promote hardy growth preparatory to winter. The lawn owner who follows Nature's example will certainly be rewarded by a better lawn with the minimum of effort and expense.

Scott Literature

Fifty-five issues of *Lawn Care* have been published previous to this one. Practically every weed and pest in the list of turf enemies has been discussed. These bulletins are available in paper binding at actual cost of 25c postage paid and in loose leaf binder with automatic pencil attached for \$1.00. *Lawn Care* is a worthwhile addition to any library.

Two Scott booklets *GOOD LAWNS* and *BENT LAWNS* may be had for the asking. Both are especially helpful to those concerned with the building of new lawns.

More Crabgrass Weapons

"It may be of interest to you and some of your patrons to know about my method of eradicating Crabgrass from the lawn. I use a Dandelion rake which is a solid piece of curved steel with teeth. The teeth are close enough together so that it rakes loose all the sucker roots or roots at the joints and in the majority of the cases pulls the main root up, thus taking the entire plant. If not, there is not enough of it left to bother and by immediately mowing very close and catching the clippings the ground is then ready for seeding."
—FRED W. POTTER, Henry, Ill.

"I used the blow torch on two sections of the lawn and on the third I

sprinkled 12 gallons of gasoline, about 8 square feet at a time, and set fire to it. This burned off much or all of the grass and I hope all or much of the Crabgrass seed, and I do not believe the gasoline did any harm to the soil as it was fired before it had time to soak in far."—HARRY T. MILLER, 1801-19 National Bank Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

No Grass Substitute

"I was pleased to see you take up the matter of grass substitutes. It should be stressed that there is no real substitute for grass as far as normal conditions and locations are concerned. Certain ones will grow in shady places or poor soil or certain ones have a texture and character that fit better into a rock garden or herb garden than does grass but they must be used with care. There is one important point that you did not mention, I believe, and that is that some are really weeds. When they are placed near a garden area or a lawn area they will escape and be the cause of many a headache."—H. O. Perkins, Instructor in Landscape Gardening, Connecticut State College, Storrs, Conn.

Another Dog Has Dandelion Weakness

"Your dandelion-dog story is a good one. I'll not try to go it one better but only record that our Boston terrier "Kip," aged 9, has for several years been consuming Dandelion tops emphasizing the golden yellow flowers. How he can hold so many blossoms is quite a question. They don't get a chance to go to seed and no holes are dug in the lawn."—Wellen H. Colburn, 114 Grand View Avenue, Wollaston, Mass.

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