

# Lawn Care

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## DRY WEATHER 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.

Appended to this article is a digest of moisture conditions as reported by various State Experiment Stations. 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.



Doc can't decide whether its Jap beetles or German moles.

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.

### Weather Reports

Here are excerpts from letters received in February from various State Experiment Stations:

**Massachusetts:** "For the year we are short 4.26 inches of rainfall. In January we had only 1.09 inch of precipitation."

**Maine:** "We have had no serious shortage of moisture in the past season."

**New Hampshire:** "Our worst drouth year here was 1941. Rainfall in 1943 was not far from normal."

**Connecticut:** "We were short 9.25 inches of rainfall in 1943. The two driest months were August and September."

**New York:** "There has been a serious moisture deficiency in this State. Long protracted dry freezing weather has been hard on recent plantings."

**New Jersey:** "Beginning with August and running through December we were short five inches of rainfall. The season as a whole has been one of no snow—a very open winter."

**Pennsylvania:** "In the southwestern part of the State there has been a serious moisture deficiency. Turf has been damaged there by lack of snow cover, the freezing and thawing and the drying winds. All over the State Crabgrass has been terrific."

**Virginia:** "Rainfall here has been short since August 1943. We have had very little snow so far this winter. We should get 42 inches of rainfall in this State each year. In 1943 the total was 38.81 inches. If we get reasonably good rainfall during the rest of the winter and next spring it is our opinion that grass will come back satisfactorily."

**Kentucky:** "We had only six inches of rain from August to January and very little snow so far this winter. The ground froze about the 12th of December and remained frozen until January 25th. The frost went down five or six inches. That was not unusual but we were surprised that it froze so deeply when it was so dry. The temperature has not been under five above."

**Ohio:** "For the five months beginning with September 1943, our rainfall deficiency totaled 7.82 inches. The driest month was January 1944, with .76 inch rainfall as against a normal of 3.07 inches."

**Michigan:** "The moisture deficiency in this State since September 1st totals 3.5 inches. This does not appear serious and thus far we have had an excellent winter for agriculture."

**Indiana:** "Although we have had a drouth this winter I am optimistic about grass and its ability to recover. I am wondering if there is not some condensation going on to make up for part of our rainfall deficiency."

**Illinois:** "Moisture shortage is more or less general over this state. January

precipitation was only .22 inch as compared with an average of 2.16 inches. If there is no snow or inadequate spring rains with warmer weather the situation might soon be serious. Locally at least there is still moisture in the surface soil."

**Missouri:** "Reports from a wide territory indicate that deficient soil moisture supply exists. This is due to the below normal rainfall since fall. Dry conditions seem especially pronounced in Iowa, Nebraska, and also in the states to the southwest of Missouri. In central and eastern Missouri we have had a sufficient supply of moisture."

**Minnesota:** "I cannot quote the exact number of inches of moisture deficiency as it has varied in different parts. However, it is true that during December and January we have had very little precipitation. The fact that we do not have a snow cover at times when temperatures are low creates some hazard to lawns and perennials."

## 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 repellants 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.

## 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  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  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 detracting in beauty from relatively high mowing, preferably  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  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.

## Crabgrass In Shade

Some readers of LAWN CARE will remember that we have stated definitely that Crabgrass does not grow where there is much shade.

Comes now Mr. J. E. Dean of Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, with pictures as proof that it does thrive in the shade at his place. He had healthy specimens last year growing back of a large stone slab leaning against the north side of a building, also some enclosed on two sides by a high wall and shaded on another side by trees and shrubs.

Well, it's hard to explain. Maybe Mr. Dean has a new variety that grows in sun or shade. Certainly his experience is unusual as ordinarily Crabgrass fades out wherever there is reduced sunlight.

## Ants

SIRS:

Several years ago I had a family of ants move into my premises. They advertised it to all their relations. My lawn suffered—so did my Blue Spruce and my flower garden. Digging over a few of the hills I observed that ants multiply with the aid of eggs. I reasoned that water would not help matters any for the ants so I began to flood the hills and kept repeating it every few days. The ants moved a few feet away and started again. I kept right after them until they all pulled up stakes and left for parts unknown.

W. J. WATT.

Bay City, Michigan.

## The Scott Publications

**Lawn Care**—Subjects featured in previous bulletins include:

- 1928 Plantain, Sodium Chlorate.
- 1929 Compost, Moss, Web Worms, Iron Sulphate, Buckhorn.
- 1930 Ground Ivy, Yarrow, Earthworms, Heal-All, Ants.
- 1931 Speedwell, Creeping Buttercup, Moles, Knotweed.
- 1932 Sheep Sorrel, Quackgrass, Spurge, Trefoil, Goosegrass.
- 1933 Nimble Will, Knawel, Terraces, Shepherd's Purse, Ground Covers.
- 1934 Sedge, Purslane, Spring Seeding, Dandelions, Summer Feeding.
- 1935 Peppergrass, Shade, Summer Injury.
- 1936 Clover, Poa Annua, Henbit, Fall Seeding, Foxtail.
- 1937 Honeycombed Soil, Grubs, Orchard Grass, Soils, Turf Diseases.
- 1938 Liming, Dandelions, Chinch Bugs, Burlap Cover, Wild Garlic.
- 1939 Chickweed, Mowing, Dandelions, Fall Seeding, Poison Ivy.
- 1940 Spring Program, Organic Matter, Watering, Vitamins.
- 1941 Winter Affects Grass, Fertilizing, Moneywort, Mallow, Weed Control.
- 1942 Care of Tools, Tree Feeding, Crabgrass, Devil's Paint Brush.
- 1943 Spring Program, Gardening, Pennywort, Dogs Beware, Winter Damage.

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