

# Lawn Care

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## MOST FOLKS WASTE SEED—DO YOU?

THE PRESENT situation in many agricultural commodities is an over-abundant supply. Frequent references in the daily news tell of tremendous



storage quantities of wheat, corn, eggs, potatoes, and many other commodities.

In contrast there is no surplus of lawn seed. In fact there would not be enough to go around except that most seed crops are still operating in a free market. When harvests are poor, prices go up because of short supply. These higher prices restrict some purchases, thus reducing the demand and keeping prices from going out of sight.

The consumption of grass seed in this country is much greater than 25 years ago. The increased population, the trend to building homes on larger lots has meant a much greater use of lawn seed than went into the ground a few years ago.

Increased consumption might be offset by increased production but that is outside the province of man since grass seed harvests are almost entirely controlled by the weather. Most grass varieties are harvested in segregated and far flung sections of the United States, Canada, Western Europe, New Zealand and Australia. The ideal weather sequence is a wet fall, cold winter, moderately early and wet spring with a hot,

dry summer for harvesting. These conditions have been prevalent for only a few varieties in the last several years.

Prices could be brought down by a reduction in the annual waste of seed. Most people scatter it to the winds or broadcast it in depth. If good seed of the right varieties is used, the seed can and should be planted sparingly.

A popular fallacy is the idea that because a soil is poor, an extra heavy seeding will insure a good lawn. The results are opposite because the poorer a soil the fewer plants it will support.

Much seed is wasted because of hand broadcasting. By this method eight or ten times the required amount of seed is dumped in spots. Few should try to sow seed by hand unless it is first mixed with screened sand or soil, Turf Builder, vermiculite or pulverized peat moss to increase the bulk at least four-fold.

Best of all is the use of a spreader of the kind designed to sow seed evenly yet sparingly.

## Growth and Harvest of Seed

A frequent question is: How do you get seed anyway? Is it a cultivated crop or does it just grow like Topsy?

Generally seed is produced in clean fields of single grass varieties by growers who specialize in one variety.

The grass is permitted to grow until it produces bloom, pollinates and sets seed like a typical annual or perennial in the flower bed. If the soil and climate are right, the seeds will mature,

after which they can be harvested, cured, threshed and stored for after-ripening. If nothing has gone wrong in any step, then the seed may prove viable. This fact is established by making germination tests of representative samples to show whether the particular lot of seed has the ability to grow.

Viability proven, any lot of seed is still far from ready to blend into a quality lawn seed. It must be cleaned and re-cleaned to remove dirt, chaff, sticks, immature grains. This trash may constitute 50% of the weight of the original seed but even that is not the worst feature of ordinary seed. Instead it is the heavy content of weed seeds. Every single noxious weed ought to be removed and other weeds so the total is less than one tenth of one percent.

Besides growing ability and freedom from chaff and weeds, there is another striking difference and that is in the varieties used to make up a lawn seed blend. There are many kinds of grasses of varying turf value, some perennial, some annual.

The most desirable perennial grasses have rather small seeds compared to the cheaper kinds. This makes it possible to get the lowest-cost seeding by using the highest-priced seed. How? Because you simply sow less seed.

At best one seed produces one plant. If a blend contains only a million seeds per pound, obviously it will be necessary to sow three times as much to get coverage compared to a better blend containing 3 million seeds per pound. The cost of three pounds of ordinary coarse seed will be greater than one pound of good seed.

This is one of the few examples where top quality is actual cost economy. Usually premium price is justified in the satisfaction derived from the extra luxury. In good lawn seed you actually get this *plus bonus* without extra cost.

## AN OLD FRIEND IS BACK

One of the first curtailments of the war period affecting turf was a variety with the aristocratic name *Poa Trivialis* (*rhymes with trivee-alice*). It was a proud grass, too, produced by hardy Danish farmers. The world production then as now came from the green fields of Denmark.



*Poa Trivialis* is one of the few varieties commonly known by its botanical or Latin designation. As a matter of fact, no suitable English name has ever been applied though it has at times been called

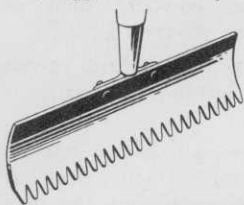
Rough Stalked Meadow Grass and Rough Bluegrass—both misnomers because the grass is definitely not rough.

Though seed production is limited to one small country, *Poa Trivialis* grows luxuriantly as a turf grass in all temperate zones. Its vivid green color gives lawns an extra lustre and sparkle. Generally it holds its color better in cold weather than native varieties. It does well in full sun if the soil condition is reasonably moist and tolerates a considerable amount of shade, so it is at home in almost any lawn.

*Poa Trivialis* is restored with considerable pride as one of the important components of Scotts Lawn Seed. Until the second World War it has always been one of its basic ingredients and was the first commercial lawn seed in which *Poa Trivialis* was used.

SIRS:

I had noted in your LAWN CARE No. 106, suggestions of implements for loosening



the soil crust of old lawns. Instead of using any of these I took one of those curved-tooth rakes which are designed for pulling Crabgrass, straightened out the teeth considerably by tapping it with a hammer, and, in my opinion, made a more effective tool than those suggested. Used with a hacking motion it breaks up the soil of bare spots with little damage to the remaining grass.

RAY E. SNELL.

Lincoln, Nebraska.

## DREAM GRASSES IN THE NEWS

Among the dreams of home-owners are push-button heat via low cost atomic energy and a beautiful green lawn without any energy at all.

Some recent publicity makes it seem like the millenium has been reached in two grass varieties: one of slow growth (it won't need mowing), another that chokes out Crabgrass. A nice dream, but hardly more than that.

One of the grasses is a selection of Bluegrass designated B-27, also Merion Bluegrass. The earliest guess for seed is two years and only a small quantity then. As to routing Crabgrass, the New York Herald Tribune expressed doubt on its editorial page:

"We do not think that exterminated Crabgrass ought to be counted out two years ahead of time. Crabgrass is a powerful and resourceful weed. The new bluegrass may be disease resistant, but Crabgrass just doesn't know what disease means. When the Oregon-bred bluegrass comes east and tries to push Connecticut and Long Island Crabgrass around, it is very likely to find, we fear, that it will need to go back to the coast for two more years of training on a high protein diet and plenty of Louisville bourbon."

Actually, three years in Scotts test lawns indicate many advantages for Merion Bluegrass but knocking out Crabgrass is not one of them.

The other grass, a new strain of Bermuda Grass experimentally called U-3, perhaps should not be produced anyway since there is no indication as yet that it will behave. An editorial writer for the Baltimore Sun brought up just one of the problems:

"Let no amateur gardener suppose that this new Bermuda Grass is going to be an unalloyed blessing. Another name for Bermuda is 'Wire Grass' [Devil Grass in California] by which name it is a perennial weed which can be exterminated from flower beds and gardens only with the greatest difficulty. Once a garden is infested with Wire Grass, it stays that way. The more thoroughly its runners are subdivided, the worse it gets—every little snip promptly re-roots itself. What in this case may be a lawnkeeper's meat is most definitely liable to become a gardener's poison."

Neither variety is near commercial production and this was so indicated but many folks overlooked that point.

A few years ago Zoysia grasses from Korea were touted as the answer to turf problems. They did not prove to be any more so than wild white clover, Kent clover, Svalof ryegrass or Aberystwyth timothy. And then there was the period of "English Bluegrass" trading on the reputation which England has for fine lawns, to sell a poor hay grass.

Oh, and lest we forget, Alta Fescue, brother or at least cousin to the "English Bluegrass" is no longer the fair haired grass, and interest is waning in other fancy fescue grasses as performance fails to keep up with glowing advance notices.

Most of these grasses have certain limited applications but hardly belong in a fine lawn. None will control Crabgrass or any other weeds. Having a nice lawn is still a matter of selecting a good blend of seed, supplying ade-

quate lawn food and following an intelligent maintenance program.

From the Detroit News editorial page:

"There is a superstition that a thick planting of clover will choke out weeds. This the Commentator greets with hollow laughter. He sowed ladino clover in his orchard of dwarf fruit trees. It came up beautifully; it wanders all over the place, and it trips him up whenever he ventures among it. And never has he seen better weeds than are to be found among the clover—dandelions a foot across and two feet tall; plantains five times the size of spinach; and as for evening primroses—whew!"

Style changes in clothes? Fine! Mabe they keep us from getting in a rut. But beware of style changes in grasses to clothe the earth. Nature is a smart mother. She is sure to show up falsies. We're all for progress but let's have new ideas adequately proven and under home conditions before going overboard.



## HORMONE SEED TREATMENTS AGAIN FAIL

Some fifteen years ago, two young scientists of Boyce Thompson Institute for Plant Research at Yonkers, New York, were acclaimed for their work in synthesizing plant hormones and showing how they could be utilized beneficially in rooting of cuttings.

Since extensive work on seed germination had been carried on at this same institution, they conducted test after test

to try to get better germination and seedling growth by treating seeds with various hormone powders such as Alpha Naphthylene Acetamide.

They met only with failure, results harmful at times but mostly negative—nothing at all.

Because of one publicized test of another investigator, a recent effort has been made to commercialize the idea of hormone treatment of seeds. Some broad claims have been made in advertising and these seemed to call for reevaluation of previous experimental work at Boyce Thompson. This was started last summer and recently completed.

Because of the extreme interest of LAWN CARE readers in the subject, the Institute has kindly released a summary of this work in advance of publication in their own technical journal.

Comparisons were made in outdoor grass seedings and in the greenhouse. Seeds were treated with (1) the pure hormone chemicals, (2) a commercially offered seed treatment composition, (3) pure talc, the usual inert carrier for hormone products; then planted in comparison with non-treated seeds.

When the readings were in, on both outdoor and greenhouse tests, no beneficial effects could be observed from treating the seeds with hormone compounds. Growth was no better, dry weights no greater, no improvement in color or density of the turf.

These results tally with other scientific findings and with Scotts test plots so LAWN CARE is inclined to agree with the statement of a Boyce Thompson official that "as yet there seems no justification for claimed benefits of hormone treated grass seeds."

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