

## **HOW TO SOW AND CARE FOR A LAWN.**

Lawns are perhaps the most noticeable feature of the home garden as they provide the focus for outdoor activities, create a feeling of spaciousness and enhance the surrounding garden.

Lawns make gardens look great, are excellent ground covers for suppressing weeds and are one of the few plants that can be continuously cut off just above ground level.

This lush, green carpet effect is easily obtainable but the type of lawn you choose could make all the difference. Stop and think, what purpose will it serve? What is your soil type? And more important, how much time do you have to maintain it? The all important water bill could be reduced by simply selecting a drought tolerant variety of lawn seed.

### ***LAWN SEED***

Lawn seed is a prime example of "you get what you pay for". Seed is sold by weight. One rye grass weighs 20 times as much as a blue grass seed and therefore one kg of blue grass seed has 20 times as much seed as one kg of rye grass. A quick check of seed mixes will ensure value for money.

The tall fescues available in your Garden Centre are most suitable of the non-running type grasses. We recommend Yates Go Grass, which is a blend, and Munns Arid lawn seed which is also a tall fescue.

These seeds are the "best" general purpose mixes available. They are:

- \* Clean cutting
- \* Reasonably rapid to establish
- \* Hard wearing (better than common Rye mixtures).
- \* Suitable for most soil types
- \* Green year round (provided adequately watered).
- \* More drought tolerant than "cheap" mixtures.

### ***WHEN TO PLANT***

When to plant: spring and autumn are ideal but lawns can be sown successfully over many other months. Do ask for advice. Avoid planting in high summer heat.

### ***WHERE TO PLANT***

Lawn grasses grow best in an open, sunny, well drained situation. They prefer not to compete with the roots of trees and shrubs for water and food. Your area of grass should be designed to complement your garden and help turn it into your outdoor living area.

Most lawn grasses grow best in an open sunny position. The tall fescues are, however, tolerant of up to 80 percent shade. Any heavier shade than this would almost certainly require a shade loving ground cover instead. Ask for advice if you are unsure.

In many gardens, size, drainage conditions, shade or slope can make lawn maintenance both time consuming and costly. You may find instead that what you need is just a low maintenance area, such as a rock garden or some native plants mulched with wood chips, or perhaps an aromatic ground cover. For alternatives to grass ask for advice.

### ***PLANTING - PREPARATION IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS.***

\* Remove weeds and previous grass. Do not rotary hoe or dig them under as many will not be killed so dig them out or poison them. For advice about poisons ask your Nursery staff. Generally Glyphosate based products are the safest to use. These are the brand names ZERO and ROUNDUP. Do not use a herbicide which will remain in the soil.

\* Check the soil PH. If too "sweet" (alkaline) add Aluminium Sulphate, if too "sour" (acid) spread lime.

\* Dig or rotary hoe the soil and rake out any rubbish.

\* If drainage is really bad you should improve it by the addition of agricultural drainage. These days there are many simple and inexpensive drainage materials available to use.

\* Dig or loosen soil to a depth of about 8cm. Make top 2cm (about 1") of soil as fine as you can - a load of top soil will help you with this. Remove any clods or lumps.

\* Make the surfaces as even as you can to avoid 'humps' and 'hollows'. Rake in YATES GRO PLUS Brand Lawn Starter (not Lawn Food - that comes about 6 to 8 weeks later).

\* For new lawns spread seed at the rate of 30g per square metre (approximately a handful). For worn patches in your lawn use this same amount. For general thickening of an established lawn use half this amount.

\* Distribute as evenly as possible and rake lightly into the soil surface. Here's a useful tip - keep a little seed in reserve for over sowing the patches you missed the first time.

\* Firm down the surface with a roller or by walking over it. This helps germination tremendously.

\* Water and keep damp until the lawn is established. This is very, very important. If the seed or shoot dries out during the germination period your results will be poor. In warmer weather it is a good idea to soak with a soft mist spray morning and evening.

\* Mow when the grass is 8 to 10cm high so you can just cut the top 2cm off the grass. This encourages root growth. As the lawn matures, lower the blades of the mower on successive cuts.

\* Once lawn is established feed frequently. We recommend YATES GRO PLUS lawn food, or DYNAMIC LIFTER lawn food. For extended slow release feeding we recommend DEBCO GREENJACKET for lawns, or SCOTT'S LAWN BUILDER.

### ***WATERING***

Watering New Lawns initially slow and deep. Use a fine mist to keep the seed bed moist. Never let it dry out. You may have to water several times daily in very hot weather. When lawn is showing clearly, water daily then reduce watering to a soaking once a week after the 3rd or 4th mow. Never let it "look" dry. Watering after sunrise is best but avoid watering after sunset unless absolutely necessary.

However, even the best lawn has problems. One problem with lawns is brown patches caused by plants dying off. This is particularly a problem in summer when there is less water and on lawns that are on a slope so that the water tends to run off and the soil becomes water repellent.

The age old method of getting the water to soak down to the roots is to use a fork to prise up the soil slightly to aerate the lawn so that when you water, it will sink in through the holes. After a while these holes will close up and the process will need repeating. A better, but more ruthless method is to use the pointy end of a pick axe to prise large holes into the difficult areas where the soil has been compacted. Sprinkle sand over the surface around these holes so that when it rains, the sand forms a tube into the soil which will allow water to penetrate deeply. Eventually the grass will grow over them, but they will still be there beneath it for a long time.

Fat is a name given to dry areas of grass caused by over-fertilisation with artificial fertilisers that make the soil so acidic that dead grass won't rot. You need to get rid of the fat by raking the grass. This is harsh, but the grass rake will only rip out dead plants, leaving the living ones intact. The dead grass is great for the compost. Choose a grass seed that matches the other grasses in your lawn and sprinkle it with or without sand onto the scarified lawn. It will germinate in summer in about five days, but in winter it will take twice as long. To feed a lawn mix one part blood and bone, one part pulverised chicken manure and one part river sand to bulk it out and stop the fertiliser from burning the grass. Sprinkle it on two to three times a year and it will sink in, become available to the roots and produce a green, healthy lawn.

Established Lawns: Most lawns do without watering for much of the year. It's mainly through the summer months that you need to turn on your sprinkler. The following can help to reduce your water costs without detriment to the quality of your lawn.

1. Delay watering as long as possible in the warmer months and lengthen the time between waterings.
2. Soak the soil - use a fine spray and allow water to soak down to the full depth of the root zone. Aeration will help as too will DEBCO "SATURAIT" or 'Wettasoil' in heavy soils.
3. Aerate or spike the soil to allow more rapid soaking.
4. Never water in the heat of the day and for maximum benefit, water at night but before it's dark.
5. A good soaking one or two evenings a week is more beneficial than a sprinkling seven days a week. In addition, this allows the soil to dry out slightly between waterings, reducing the risk of fungal infections.
6. Not only does over-watering leach nutrients from the soil, it also wastes fertiliser.
7. To stop run-off, especially on steep slopes with clay soils, use a fine spray for short (five minute) periods per watering, improve soil structure and spike or aerate the lawn.

## ***MOWING***

New Lawns: Mow when the grass is 8 to 10cm high so you can just cut the top 2cm off the grass. This encourages root growth. (**Young grass can be damaged by close mowing**). As the lawn matures the blades can be lowered gradually on each successive mow.

- Established Lawns: Many home gardeners make the mistake of trying to create a bowling green in their garden. This can be expensive in time, money and water.
- Never cut a lawn on the lowest or second lowest settings. The fourth setting is best, especially in summer because it enables the plants to produce long roots and become drought resistant.

## ***VARIETIES***

As mentioned before, of the narrow bladed "tufting" grasses, the tall fescues are currently the most suitable. Also the blends of "Sun and Shade" varieties.

Of the "running" grasses, there are choices with YATES SPEEDY COUCH - a fast germinating sun loving grass, MUNNS POOCH COUCH - a hardy variety

Buffalo varieties do not come as seed - only turf, which requires special preparation and care.

## ***EXTRA MAINTENANCE***

\* If you feed your lawn regularly, and you should, your soil will gradually become acid. Correct this in the winter by the addition of lime. Winter is also the ideal time for aerating lawns.

\* Weeds can be a nuisance and there are many different types. Do try to control them with hand weeding if possible, I use Weed & Feed.

\* Pests - Lawn pests tend to be seasonal. A few years ago there was a plague of lawn army worm in the coastal districts of NSW. Also watch out for the larvae of the lawn beetle - this creature nibbles at the roots of the grass and destroys the lawn. Both can be successfully treated with BAYTHROID a synthetic pyrethroid from BAYER. If you have inherited a kikuyu lawn, {which is not really suitable for suburban gardens !} your lawn may turn yellow in round patches at certain times of the year. This is kikuyu yellows - a fungal disease, for which there is no chemical treatment. Improved drainage and feeding will help recovery.

The following lawn care notes are provided by courtesy of Arthur Yates & Co Pty. Ltd. Visit the current Yates pages at Greengold on the Internet for expert advice on the current season.

## ***Autumn Lawn Care***

Autumn is a very important season in the lawn care calendar because it's the last chance to get the lawn back into tip top condition before the cold weather arrives.

Lawns are often exposed to a lot of stress during autumn. Apart from the gradual shut down that's taking place in the grass plant as the cold weather approaches, there are often the ravages of insect and disease damage to be mended.

### ***Insect Damage***

Army Worm – This is a grass eating caterpillar that moves through the lawn like a raiding army (hence its common name) and can reduce grass leaves to tattered shreds almost overnight. Army worm is effectively controlled by the synthetic pyrethroid, Baythroid.

Sod Webworm - This is another grass eating grub that often attacks summer/autumn lawns and can also be kept in check with Baythroid.

African Black Beetle – A form of scarab beetle (a group that has thousands of species worldwide) that eats grass leaves and grass roots, both in its adult and its larval (curl grub) stages. Hortico Lawn Beetle and Slater Killer Granules will control both the adults and the larvae. Baythroid will almost miraculously 'flush' the adults to the surface.

Once these pest numbers are reduced it's important to get as much growth as possible out of the lawn before the cold weather really hits. A fast acting soluble fertiliser such as Thrive, distributed through a hose-end Thrive 'Easy'Feed, will give the lawn a quick shot of nitrogen to promote rapid leaf growth, and provide the potassium and phosphorus that will strengthen the root system and build up the grass plants' disease resistance.

There's one extra trick that will help a wounded lawn to recover. For centuries, seaweed has been recognized for its ability to heal wounds and promote growth. Yates Kelpak Seaweed Plant Tonic can encourage damaged grass roots to start growing again.

### ***Fungal Disease***

Autumn is also the season of 'blots and spots' on the lawn. These patches are often caused by fungal diseases and autumn, 'the season of mists', is the time of year when they really flourish. Brown Patch, Dollar Spot, Fairy Ring, Rusts – the names seem endless and these diseases can be difficult for even the experts to diagnose.

Many lawn diseases can be treated by watering with Mancozeb (or Bayleton for Dollar Spot), by aerating the lawn with a garden fork, and by feeding with a fast acting fertiliser. Thrive Flower and Fruit contains boosted levels of potassium, the nutrient that gives plants added disease resistance.