

## PROBLEM LAWNS

Each week I have to think about what to write for the coming week and sometimes it is you, my readers, that give me an answer and this week is no exception as two readers phoned with lawn problems that could be fixed with one solution.

To start with it is now autumn and we have had rain so the soil is nice and moist; still a bit on the warm side except for those colder areas. It is the perfect time to sow lawn seed and I recommend 'Super Strike' as it makes a nice lawn that is fast germinating.

If you are sowing a new lawn then you should have prepared the area and killed off all the weed seeds that had germinated (or do this before sowing your lawn seed)

If you are over-sowing a lawn you are better off to hire a scarifier to rip out the thatch and leave the grooves for your new seeds to fall into.

Sowing new seeds every autumn helps thicken up the grasses and keeps weeds from germinating.

A lawn like that is not cut low but at a height of about 25 to 50 mm dependent on your preference.

About 30mm is what I like to see.

If you are not going to sow fresh seed you should treat the lawn for thatch problems which means spaying or using a lawnboy to deliver a product called Thatch Busta.

This natural product eats up an inch of thatch in a month during reasonable conditions.

It also saves ripping your lawn apart using a scarifier or scarfing rake (which is hard work)

Grass Grubs are near the surface at this time of the year and eating the roots of your grasses.

These grasses so damaged will likely lift up easily as they have hardly any roots left or the grasses will die in the spring when they try to grow making bare patches.

Yates used to have diazinon as a lawn pest control but that chemical has been banned in NZ so no longer available. As in early articles it was also not suitable on some soil types.

Yates does have an attachment onto the hose lawn spray which is using Confidor the chemical that is now known to kill honey bees, bumble bees and native pollinators.

It has a very long term residue in the plants and soil so if used then later on (weeks and maybe months later) when daisies, buttercups, clover or other lawn weeds flower, the bees get a dose and goodbye bees.

There was a product from Australia called Professor's Mac 3 in 1 for lawns.

It has a very safe insecticide which is Eucalyptus oil at 10g/L and Tea Tree oil at 2.5g/L along with a natural lawn food and wetting agent.

I especially recommended it for people with pets and gardeners that prefer to use natural things in respect of the environment.

Unfortunately the company that produced it sold to another company in Australia and I was unable to import it in its pre-packed container.

Instead I have brought in a few drums of the product to decant into 1 litre containers and renamed it to Wallys 3 in 1 for Lawns. It will treat 50 sqM of lawn safely

Garden Enterprises also has a chemical one for those that don't have pets and have large lawns; called Wallys Lawn Pest Control. The 500 gram pack of granules will do 250sqM.

Applied at 2 grams per square metre through a Scotts Spreader and then watered to activate.

Being a chemical all safety precautions should be used especially wearing gumboots.

This product is also excellent to kill wasp and ant nests in the ground, sprinkle liberally and lightly water. Effective kill period is about 6 weeks.

If porina caterpillars are a problem eating at the base of the grasses at night, then the simple and very effective way to control is to mow the lawn to about 25mm, then late in the day spray the lawn with Neem Tree Oil at 15mls per litre.

That night when they take a bite they will stop eating and die of starvation. On small lawns drenches of Neem Tree Oil at 25mls per litre is another safe way to control grubs near the surface. The soil should be a little moist before applying with a lawnboy or similar.

Neem Tree Granules (Powder form) can also be used very safely, sprinkle over a freshly mowed lawn that has moist soil and lightly water to move the powder off foliage onto the soil surface.

Ideally use a roller over the lawn to press the powder into the soil.

Now one of our readers asked about the grass verge in front of their property.

The problem is paspalum that horrible grass weed that makes any lawn look a mess.

There is no spray that will kill it (there was and it is now banned) so you are left with three possibilities.

Wiping the foliage with a mix of glyphosate and Raingard without touching your grasses.

Sprinkling urea or sulphate of ammonia onto the clump so the nitrogen will burn it out.

Finally one gardener told me years ago about taking a screw driver with a bottle of diesel and plunging the diesel soaked blade into the heart of the clump.

All these methods are sort term as there will be seeds in the soil or blown in from surrounding areas.

I have thought of a long term solution that would still look ok and no more mowing of what belongs to your council. Kill off the area with a herbicide or with lots of salt. (If there are no trees growing)

Once dead you remove the top couple of inches of stubble and soil and send to the tip.

If there are plants growing on the verge cover the area with weed mat. If not cover with black builders plastic.

Then over this place artificial grass and peg down with no 8 wire having bent one end over to make like a hook. These days there are several grades of artificial grass and the more expensive ones are hard to tell from the real thing from a bit of a distance.

Those gardeners that have slopping lawns that are hard to mow or have to use a weed eater to mow could use the same process of either weed mat with ground covers or with artificial grass.

For people that need to get a lawn mowing person in to mow their lawns using artificial grass could be a big savings over the long term. You do the sums and if you have your lawn mowed between once a week to once a fortnight you are talking a few hundred dollars a year, plenty of money to make the change.

No mowing, no weeding, no feeding, no mud, no cracked or brown lawns in droughts, no lawn pests to control, no watering to keep green. You have saved hundreds of dollars.

There are companies that will do the job for you in some areas.

Do a search on Google putting into Google, Artificial Grass.

Then you can sell your motor mower as well.