

Wally's weekly News 28<sup>th</sup> FEBRUARY 2009  
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## AUTUMN TIME

We are currently about 2 months past the longest day and just about 4 months before the shortest day, and one can certainly notice the shortening hours of daylight. Also March is the first calendar month of autumn and a great time to garden. This time of the year brings the autumn rains of which, most areas have had a nice amount of recently. It could well be an early winter in many areas and even in Palmerston North I have felt the chill on the odd early morning along with some cooler evenings, bit unusual for February which often is the hottest month of the year. The fingers of winter have got a bit longer this year I fear.

For those gardeners that want to have a nice crop of winter vegetables to harvest during the cold months, then get planting now, as it is most important to get the vegetables as close to maturity as possible before winter really sets in. Plant out silverbeet, spinach, cabbages, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussel sprouts and kohlrabi. These are best planted out as seedlings from your garden centre. For seed planting do carrots, parsnips, broad beans, snow snap peas, Swedes, turnips, shallots, spring onions, radish and winter lettuces. When preparing a planting area give the soil a dose of **Rapid Lime** or a soft, fast acting garden lime.

Alternative would be crushed egg shells or powdered sea shells.

Do not use nitrogen rich products instead stick to the likes of sheep manure pellets, blood and bone and lots of aged animal manures/compost. A sprinkling of potash is also great to ensure strong, steady growth. You can also stay winter proofing your more tender plants by giving them a dose of potash.

You may like to enhance your vegetables with added trace elements by use of the natural products such as **Rok Solid** (Mineralized rock dust) and **Ocean Solids** (minerals from the ocean)

Spray the plants two weekly with **Magic Botanic Liquid** for best results.

Don't forget to sprinkle **Neem Tree Granules** on the soil by any brassicas planted and a little in the planting hole as well. This will greatly assist in the control of caterpillars which can devastate young cabbages etc.

With ample autumn rains means the need to water is greatly reduced and this in itself solves the problem for gardeners that have chlorinated water in their taps. The chlorine harms the vital soil life and worm populations.

Autumn is certainly a great time to garden, with the milder weather there are plenty of gardening jobs you can get your teeth into.

One of these of course is to sow new lawns or patch up existing lawns.

Here is some lawn sowing information from my first book; **Wally's Down to Earth Gardening Guide:**

"Before sowing any lawn seed, you will need to get rid of as many weeds in the top soil as possible. If you don't do this, you'll find the weeds will probably germinate before or along with the grass seeds, making for a big problem later on. You can rid the area of weeds before sowing by watering liberally to germinate the weed seeds. Once they're up, simply remove them by hand or with a Dutch hoe, or spray them with a suitable

weedkiller. If you use a chemical weedkiller for this job, make sure it is one which won't interfere with the germination of your lawn seed later on in other words ensure it has no residual characteristic. Once you've taken care of the weed situation while they're still small, you could continue watering to see if there are any more likely to pop up.

Obviously, you'll have to stop at some point to sow your lawn. If you leave the soil bare for too long, weed seeds will come in, either via the wind or bird droppings.

While on the subject of weeds, make sure any garden beds around the area you plan on sowing are also free of weeds, and kept that way during the time you're preparing the new lawn.

The next thing you will need to do is spread a good fertiliser over the bare soil before sowing in your lawn seed. My recommendation would be an organic product called

**Break Through**, a slow-release fertiliser.

### SOWING THE SEEDS:

Now that you're ready to sow your seeds, pick the best time of day to do it. Ideally, this is late in the day, just before dusk, or even after dusk if you have adequate outside lighting. Doing it any earlier will mean the birds will be watching you, and will return later to eat your lawn seed.

The best way to sow evenly is to use a spreader, set at the right gauge for sowing.

Depending on the type of seed you purchased, the rate will be somewhere between 35 and 50 grams per square metre. If you're likely to walk over areas you have already sown during this process, make sure the soil isn't damp enough to pick up the soil and seeds on the soles of your shoes. A good tip here is to wrap your shoes in a couple of layers of plastic shopping bags this will give them a smoother surface and make it more difficult for earth and seeds to cling on.

After sowing all your seeds, give the area a light watering with sprinklers to settle in the seeds. You can also do this by using a roller to press the seed into the soil, then watering lightly.

I prefer to cover my seed with sharp sand (plasters' sand) as is it more weed-free than river sand. Starting at one side, sprinkle the sand until you can't see the seeds underneath. The sand should be dry, and will adhere to the moist soil and seeds. You can then walk on the sand without worrying about picking up seeds on your shoes. This allows you to progressively spread the sand over the whole area.

It is most important to sow really top quality lawn seed and one that is readily available is called Super Strike.

A very light watering of the new lawn 2 to 3 times a day will help speed up germination.

Remember that this is just a light watering; enough only to dampen down the sand.

Applying too much water won't help, and unless you get a really heavy downpour, rain is unlikely to pose a problem either. But it is important to keep the new grasses a little on the moist side.

Once the grasses are established and have reached about 4 to 5cm in height, you can do you're first mowing, removing only about 1 to 2cm off the top. This will encourage the grasses to branch out, making for a denser lawn. Never mow more than one third off the height of your grasses in any one mowing, whatever age your lawn is, and always use a catcher as clippings left lying around after mowing will only increase problems with thatch. This is really important.

A good lawn should be about 3 to 4cm tall, perhaps even taller, and should be a dense, thick pile of grass. It should never be less than 2cm in height. Only cut off the top third of the grasses with any one mowing.

The ideal colour of a healthy lawn should be a deep to emerald green.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)