

Wally's weekly News 30th AUGUST 2008
Written by Wally Richards.

LOOKING AT LAWNS

With the first month of spring very near, now is the time to sort out any lawn problems that you may have. Lawn problems include; sparse grass coverage, lawn weeds, patchy areas, moss, soil insects, ponding, thatch and the health of grasses.

The first thing to do is an inspection of all your lawn areas and take a few notes on what problems are found. Part of the inspection should be to lift a little turf in each lawn to find out what is happening under the ground. This is simply done by taking a spade and cutting a square the width of the spade's blade into the lawn, then lifting that square taking about 50 to 60mm of turf out.

Check the soil at the base of this square hole for grubs of either grass grubs or black beetles and also examine the soil and roots of the section lifted for the same. If you find a few grubs in the square area say up to about 5 then it is not a real problem at this time. If a great number are found then you should seriously consider a treatment. You may find some greasy looking caterpillars and these are the native porina. If any of these are found then it is worthwhile treating for them.

While the section of lawn is out take a look at the side profile and see if there is debris sitting on top of the soil at the bases of the grass shoots. If you find a layer a few mm thick then it is advisable to treat for this.

Lawn areas that are near windows or lights that are on at night should be specially checked for grubs as these are areas where a problem is most likely to exist.

Also if you have areas where in the past there has been grub problems check the populations in these spots also.

For moss spray the lawn with **Moss and Liverwort Control**.

Now check for weed problems. In sparse lawns you can have a lot of weeds as they can establish because of lack of competition from a good coverage of grasses. If you have been mowing your lawn too short then you have weakened the grasses and allowed weeds to establish.

If you have a mower man cut your lawns then likely you have two problems as a result; they maybe mowing the lawn too short and their mower equipment maybe bringing in weed seeds from other lawns.

The perfect combination for creating a weedy lawn that needs to be mowed twice as much as a good lawn. Great for the mower man but bad for your lawn and pocket.

With ponding, or areas where water lays for several days, or longer during wet times, can only be cured by installing drainage pipes and for you to decide whether to put up with it or fix it.

Mild ponding maybe fixed by taking a garden fork and plunging the tines deep into the soil which will break through any crusts and allow the water to seep away faster. You can take this a step further by pouring sharp sand down into the holes made.

Next step would be to sort out weed problems and you can do one of three things; if there are only a few weeds these are best cut out by hand. A larger number of weeds can be dealt to by sprinkling sulphate of ammonia over the weeds, dry and left dry for a few days of non rain to burn them out. This may also burn grasses where applied but normally the grasses will recover.

For lawns with lots of weeds you may need to use a lawn weed spray.

Once the weeds are cleared up patching and over sowing of sparse areas can now be done and you should use a top quality lawn seed that is not coated such as 'Super Strike' Because birds are hungry at this time of the year you need to protect the areas sown till the seeds germinate. Superstrike lawn seed is fast germinating so the protection time is short.

Wait till dusk to sow the seed over bare areas or over the whole of a sparse lawn. (The birds should be roosting for the night at that time) Next spray the seeds with **Magic Botanic Liquid** to further speed up germination and then cover the seed sown with sharp sand. (Sharp sand is builders or plaster's sand)

Now on the other side of the house throw some fresh cheap bread to feed the birds in the morning.

During the day toss more bread to keep them well fed. Repeat this till the new seeds have germinated.

If you found a layer of thatch on the soil you can spray the lawn with **Thatch Busta** which will build up the microbe populations which will eat up the thatch for you.

Now while that is all happening you can deal to the soil insect problems.

If you have porina caterpillars then after mowing the lawn, later in the day, spray the grasses with **Neem Tree Oil** at a rate of 15mls per litre of warm water. Your spray should be directed to the base of the grasses as that is where the caterpillars feed in the early evening. Once the grubs get some Neem Oil in their gut they will never eat again. (Anti-feedent)

If you found that you have grass grubs or black beetle grubs, then late in the day treat the lawn areas where they are with Professor Mac's 3 in 1 for lawns. This is totally organic and will not harm wild life or children as it is made from eucalyptus and tea tree oils. It will also take out the porina and nematodes in the lawn along with all the slugs that live in lawns. It is not harmful to worm populations deeper down in the soil. (You can also add Neem Oil to the **Professor Mac's** spray if you wish)

Professor Mac's also feeds the lawn and contains a wetting agent. Just follow the instructions for application.

If you have only a few small areas to patch you may like to do so with the following method which overcomes bird problems.

By using either seedling trays about 50mm deep or punnets fill them with a friable purchased compost to just below the rim. Now sprinkle your Super Strike seeds over the surface and spray them with **Magic Botanic Liquid**. Cover the seeds with some sharp sand and place the trays in a sheltered sunny area, cover with some old curtain netting to keep the birds off. Check every day and water lightly to keep the sand moist. Within a few days you should have a neat strike of young grasses appearing. Once a good strike has appeared then remove the curtain netting and keep moist. Once the grasses have reached a height of about 50mm trim off about 10mm with a pair of sharp scissors. Repeat this a couple of times over the next couple of weeks or so. This strengthens up the grasses and develops a good root structure.

When ready all you need to do is dig out the soil in the patch where you want to plant your grass and after removing the grass from the trays place into these areas so they are level with the surrounding soil and grasses.

To build up the health of your existing lawns you can apply gypsum, dolomite and a light

sprinkling of garden lime. Rock dust such as **Simalith or Rok Solid** can also be applied. For a lawn fertiliser the best is **Bio Boost** or a slow release one.

For growth you can dissolve a 100 grams of Sulphate of ammonia into 10 litres of water and apply it over 100 square metres of lawn.

A sprinkling of sulphate of potash and **Bio Phos** can be applied and lightly watered in with **Magic Botanic Liquid**. (These are alternatives to the harsh effect of common powder lawn fertiliser.)

A light sprinkling of sulphate of iron will help green up the grasses making a lush lawn. Lightly water in.

Feeding the lawn with liquid fertilisers is easily done by placing the concentrate into a snap on the hose applicator and watering the lawn.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)

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