

Wally's Weekly News 4th APRIL 2009
Written by Wally Richards.

LAWN SOWING TIME

There are two important gardening events about to take place; daylight savings ended on the 5th April and autumn rains are starting, both events herald the real beginning of autumn.

The end of daylight savings means we have less time before dusk to do any gardening chores plus the knowledge that we are only about 12 weeks away from the shortest day. As the days shorten plant growth slows and temperatures cool. Gardeners need to be mindful of this and to be careful when watering gardens or containers as the plants require less water and wet feet gives rise to wet weather diseases. (Spray susceptible plants with **Perkfection** Supa) Parched soils have been soaking up the recent rains and this promotes seeds of weeds, which laid dormant over the summer months to germinate. Watch out for these young weeds and zap them while they are very small. If allowed to grow they will race to maturity before winter sets in and drop a fresh load of seed to create weed problems for you in the spring.

A few weeks back we suggested that gardeners should prepare areas where new lawns are to be sown.

For those that have done their preparation work now is about the time to sow the new lawn seed.

Preparation work involved making about the top 15 to 20 cm of soil, friable and a good medium of soil and compost/humus for the lawn grasses to grow. It also involved the laying of drainage and irrigation systems if required and periods to germinate any weed seeds that were present.

If all the above have been done you will now have an area that is of bare soil of a fine tilth, free of weeds and moist with the recent rains. A sprinkling of Gypsum over the area and lightly watered in will assist in seed germination and root establishment. If you would like to go a step further also apply a sprinkling of **Rok Solid** rock dust and lightly water in.

At this stage you have done a lot of good work so do not spoil it by planting poor grass seed.

The best seed types to sow are ones that are a mix of fine rye and fescue. Avoid mixes that have brown top in them as the brown top is going to cause you heaps of thatch problems in the future.

(Who wants to create more work and costs for themselves?)

The modern fine rye strains are quick to establish, hard wearing and make a great looking lawn.

The fescues are also a very fine bladed grass but slower to germinate and not as hard wearing.

Many lawn seeds offered to the home gardener are thickly coated, which means you get less seed per kilo.

Some coatings are so heavy that up to half the weight of a kilo of seed is coatings. These coated types of lawn mixes are a waste of money and can have much slower and poorer germination rates.

Green keepers (the masters of turf) seldom if ever, use a coated lawn seed, instead they

prefer uncoated seed that is certified having a proven germination rate in the 90% plus with about a 99% purity.

This last figure is important as you do not want to be sowing a lawn seed mix that has a lot of grass weeds or other weeds in the mix. Consumers (Magazine) a few years back when testing common brands of lawn seeds for the home garden market found one that had no lawn seed in it at all, just weed seeds!

Though I am against coated lawn seed there is one brand called Super Strike which is an excellent mix of fescue and fine rye and the coating is so fine that it only adds 1 gram of weight per kilo of seed.

A great lawn is one that is a dense mat of fine grasses mowed at a height of 25 to 50mm tall.

A dense mat means very few weed problems as weeds can not establish in such competition and the odd one that does, can be cut out with a sharp knife. A bonus to this is that you do not have to waste a lot of money on lawn weed sprays and moss controls. The rate you sow a lawn at will determine how many seeds are in any given area. Often the rate for home gardens is 1 kilo of seed per 30 to 33 sq m. There is no reason that you cannot increase this by half or even double. A thick mat of grasses that establishes quickly will ensure you of a better lawn.

After you broadcast your seeds you can either lightly rake or even better cover the seed lightly with a weed free sand or fine pumice then lightly water to settle.

It is now important that the area be kept moist for several weeks while the seed is germinating and the grasses are establishing. Failure to maintain a good moisture level means a poorer strike and establishment. At the same time you do not want to drown the area and have seeds wash away from the places where they landed. A light watering morning and night, when it is not raining is about right.

On any hot sunny day a midday watering maybe needed.

Birds, if plentiful in the area, may help themselves to your freshly laid seeds.

To overcome this you can feed the birds with cheap fresh bread on the other side of the house.

The fresh bread will swell in their tummies and reduce their foraging habits. Placed out at dawn (or before you go to bed if not an early riser) and maybe another sprinkling of the bread later in the day.

Bird Repeller Ribbon can be stretched out over the freshly sown areas till the grasses have established.

Using the new fine rye grasses (Super Strike) means a very quick germination and less bird problems.

You can further enhance the germination and establishment by spraying the area with **Magic Botanic Liquid** after sowing and repeat two weeks later.

Endeavour to keep the area sown free of activity till two or more mowing's are completed.

Never mow off more than one third of the height of the grasses in any one mowing. This aids the grasses to branch and form that dense mat.

The type of food you supply to your lawn is also very important. Do not use the common lawn fertiliser as it can cause problems such as thatch, burning and weak rapid growth.

Besides it only gives the lawn a boost, kills the soil life and weakens the health of the grasses.

Instead use a slow release food and the best one for this is a natural product called **Break Through**. Inexpensive when compared to other lawn fertilisers and it releases over a 12 month period but should be applied to lawns in both spring and autumn.

For those with existing lawns now is the time to apply **Thatch Busta** to your lawns to clean up the thatch that has gathered in the last 6 months. Thatch is the debris that builds up on the soil at the base of the grasses.

It causes problems of drainage, disease and moss. **Thatch Busta** is sprayed over the lawn and it will aid the soil life to eat up an inch of thatch in a month in average conditions.

If you wish to thicken up the existing grasses then it pays to run a scarifier over the lawn and sow fresh seed into the grooves that are left. By scarifying and over sowing a lawn with quality lawn seed every spring and autumn till you have the desired lawn you require.

This process will tend to force weaker grasses and weeds out of the lawn and convert a poor lawn into a great one. For further information on lawns and lawn care obtain a copy of my book, **Wally's Down to Earth Gardening Guide** available from some libraries, by mail order.

There are two chapters devoted to lawns and their care.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)