

Moss control in lawns

Mosses are plants comparatively simple in structure and function and, with the Liverworts, comprise the Bryophyta family – one of the least complicated groups of the plant kingdom.

Mosses are found in very many situations, for example, on stones, tree trunks and turf. If you have moss on your lawns then it is primarily an indicator that you are not looking after the millions of individual grass plants that make up your lawn.

About 600 species of moss occur naturally in this country, but only a few are common on turf. Distinguishing three types of moss is helpful, as each of the three groups of turf-inhibiting mosses tends to occur under rather different conditions.

Although it is generally assumed that moss infestation in lawns is a direct result of acid, waterlogged and compacted soil conditions, some species favour chalky or alkaline soils. Others can be found on light, sandy soils.

Where moss is a persistent problem, it often indicates some fundamental weakness in the turf and treatment with a moss killer is often only a short-term answer.

From the 'Causes of Moss Invasion list', it should be obvious that persistent moss problems are an indication of some fundamental weakness in a turf area. The presence of significant quantities of moss for long periods each year suggests that the turf may be excessively acid, lacking in fertilizer dressings or excessively wet with a small percentage of actual grass content.

Correcting these deficiencies will result in stronger grass growth and the moss then tends to disappear naturally because of the increased competition presented by healthy grasses.

Simple treatment with a moss-killing chemical is, therefore, often not the complete answer to moss trouble. Cultural control should always be considered first. Prevention is always better than cure.

A lawn should have nothing in it except good dense healthy desirable grasses – neither weeds nor moss.

Causes of Moss Invasion

1. A moist turf – poor drainage encourages the fern-like and tufted mosses
2. A soft, spongy sward with a thick fibre layer
3. A very dry soil, e.g. over drains, on mounds and ridges.
Inadequate watering or over-drainage encourages the upright type
4. Bare areas remaining after weeds have died
5. Cutting the grass too low
6. Diseased turf
7. Dry acid soil
8. Low fertility, e.g. deficiencies of plant nutrients

9. Inappropriate maintenance - Neglect
10. Inadequate or poor grass cover and growth
11. Low nutrient status
12. Over intensive use of the surface
13. Over-consolidation of the soil - compaction
14. Poor surface levels which may lead to scalping
15. Shade from trees, hedges and buildings and topography – north facing lawn
16. Weak and sparse turf
17. Compaction & over consolidation
18. Prolonged periods of wet weather
19. Time of year – Poor Weather. Wet & Warm being the most conducive for moss growth

Action Plan.

Always a good time to start in January, as soon as weather conditions permit. Start by preparing the area, looking at the fundamentals:-

Light - Air - Water

Light conditions are generally poor until Springtime, but look at trees & bushes that might be affecting the turfed area. Cutting back, trimming, removing unsuitable items is a good practice that should not be costly.

Air. Get as much air into the ground as possible. Hollow tining, scarification, even using a garden fork. Certain wetting agents help to oxygenate the soil. Good if this can be done at reasonable cost. Review any measures that will improve the drainage of the soil.

Water. Usually a problem with too much in Winter, too little in Summer. Try to develop a method to capture rainwater that can be used later in the year.

Treatment with suitable liquids for moss & fertiliser. The aim is to encourage healthy grass growth to dominate the soil & minimise the space for moss to re-establish itself. The reason Walkover promotes the use of liquid treatments is the speed, accuracy & ease that nourishment can reach the root systems of lawned areas. Granular products react more slowly, "crunch" underfoot when walked on, and most importantly, can burn grass if not watered in.

Liquid treatments go a long way when diluted properly & sprayed accurately. The term "little & often" can be employed very effectively when a sprayer is always available & good weather conditions can be taken advantage of.

Heavy moss infestations require initial treatment with Liquid Iron, a strong, filtered high purity Sulphate of Iron. Many contractors use this product because it works so quickly, spraying in the morning, scarifying in the afternoon. Subsequent treatments will be of a preventative nature, either with weaker dilutions of Liquid Iron, or with Moss Treatment & Lawn Conditioner, which feeds much needed nutrients into the root system.