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Dandelions and Plantain Eradication Method

By JOHN MacGREGOR
Greenkeeper, Chicago Golf Club

YEARs ago an energetic truck gardner wished to have a complete assortment of vegetables. He thought it was not complete without the dandelion, and to give his countrymen their much loved greens, he imported several pounds of seed from Italy, and "Oh gawd, how we love him for his foresight." From his importation we have what you see around us in the spring, a golden sheet, as far as the eye can see; when the gold has waned, a beautiful sheet of white as of snow takes its place, and many a golfer has looked in vain under this sheet for his ball.

When this snow or seed has matured, the air becomes filled with it. Wherever they eventually stop, they germinate and fill any small space which has not already been occupied. Being a deep rooted plant, I have in the early spring pulled them out with roots three and a half feet long, so that extermination seems an impossible feat.

I have tried every device and method which I thought might combat them. First I tried cutting them under the ground, and I found they had increased instead of decreased in number; where one was, six or seven showed up from the same plant, so the pest was multiplied a thousand fold. Then I tried gasoline. I took an ordinary oil-can and soldered a spike with a sharp point to the spout. The spike extending an inch and a half beyond the end of the spout, this was pushed into the heart of the dandelion and a small amount of the gasoline deposited in the wound, which was very effective, but an expensive cure. Then there was the danger of poisoning the soil.

During this period we wrote to the Department of Agriculture at Washington for information on the eradication of dandelions. When the information came, I immediately set to work on this new system. We bought a power sprayer of 200 gallons capacity, also a potato sprayer attachment, which was attached behind the outfit.

The formula was one and a half pounds iron sulphate (copperas) to one gallon of water, the solution to be applied with 150 pounds' pressure. I followed the instructions, choosing one of the worst infested areas I could find. The day following the

application I looked over the result of the experiment and was disappointed. All that could be noticed was the leaves of the dandelions were spotted with rust. Then I noticed that where the wheels of the sprayer had traveled the leaves were entirely black. I decided we had the correct formula, but the method of application would not give the desired results, so decided, after being satisfied the foliage was destroyed where the wheels had bruised the leaves, I must devise some means of bruising the leaves so the iron could penetrate, and hit on the idea of using a chain drag which had been used during the construction of the course. I am glad to say this has proven to be the death knell of the dandelion, although success was not to come just yet.

At this time we still had horses and they were the only means by which this sprayer could be navigated. Anyone who has had anything to do with horses knows that hauling a 200-gallon sprayer, loaded, is real work, and that they must be given a breathing spell quite frequently to enable you to have them the following day, especially in hot weather. The result was, before I had covered half of the rough, the first dandelions I sprayed were just as strong as they were before I started, having completely recovered and growing as healthily as before. During this period I was trying to devise ways and means whereby this solution could be handled and applied with dispatch.

When we got the first few shipments of iron sulphate it was coarse and hard to dissolve. Upon investigation I found we could purchase granulated or sugar iron sulphate. This I found could be dissolved in less than half the time. Then I procured six 50-gallon barrels and knocked the heads out and used them for dissolving, putting 100 pounds of iron sulphate in each, dissolving with sufficient water. Three of the barrels are enough for a load in a 200-gallon tank. The other three barrels are dissolving while the load is being emptied on the course; when the men return, these three are pumped into the tank. Every time three barrels are emptied, the material is put in for the next load. I use a portable double-action suction pump for pumping the solution into the tank, using a 2-inch suction and a 2-inch outlet hose.

After two years' experimenting, we purchased a Fordson tractor. This was the first time results really began to show, as

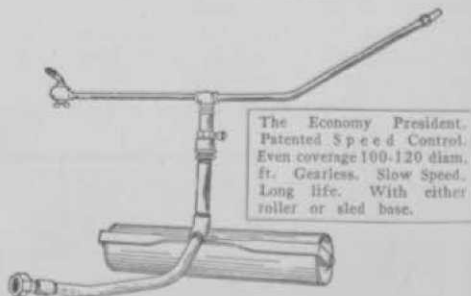
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I found the rough could be sprayed in a week, and that five successive sprayings two weeks apart would kill 98 per cent of the dandelions. The only ones left were some of the very largest, which were very easily destroyed with a weed stinger and gasoline.

The success of this treatment is evidenced by the fact that the treated areas are free from dandelions.

The fine or narrow leaved plantain can be eradicated by the same method as is used for dandelions. The broad leaved plantain when young can be destroyed in

the same way, but the older plants are not so easy to kill, as the leaves are more leathery and therefore harder to bruise. If the plantains are in the putting green, hand-weeding will be necessary, using a sharp knife and cutting under the crown just where it leaves the roots.

Do not use iron sulphate on bent-turf, either seeded or stolon. It will kill out badly.

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