

One Method For Upgrading Turf

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EARLY spring and autumn are two times of the year when something can be done about upgrading the lawn through introduction of choice varieties. Since a cultivated seedbed gives a new seeding its best chance, results are surest if the old lawn is plowed up, with unwanted vegetation perhaps first knocked out by arsonate or paraquat. Especially prized turfs, such as a golf green, may merit the expense of soil sterilization, as with methyl bromide.

But not everyone cares to invest in so complete a renovation, especially in spring when a badly disturbed lawn would hardly complement freshly budded ornamentals. Instead mechanical treatment of the old turf might offer a less drastic, inexpensive approach. It provides something of a seedbed for new seed at the same time that it sets back weedy growth in the old sod.

Some reports suggest that coarse bunchgrasses such as tall fescue may be repressed while rhizoming grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass and the fine-leaved fescues gain ground, following severe mechanical attrition of a mixed sod. Fresh sprouts from rhizomes are only a few days in appearing, and if adequate moisture prevails bolster seeding is not much longer in getting started. Maceration of the bunchgrass yields space to competing species, and should reduce stooling of the clumps. It is well to have completed mechanical renovation before the soil warms enough for crabgrass to germinate, or else a suitable crabgrass preventer should be used, (products containing siduron can be used at the same time Kentucky bluegrass, fine fescue

and Highland bentgrass are seeded, but not with bermudagrass).

Variety In Equipment

A number of machines useful in mechanical renovation are on the market. Aerifiers designed to loosen soil by punching holes have only limited usefulness, but the so-called vertical mowers for thinning, set deep enough to reach the soil, really stir things up. The intensity of treatment can be varied with the weediness of the turf. Most machines have the vertical slicing discs spaced about an inch, and thus make striations this distance apart when used one time over. If you want to really chew up the surface of the old lawn, mow vertically several times in various directions.

At least one machine on the market has three interchangeable reels for differing objectives. Besides the typical vertical slicing blades, there are flexible tines to comb thatch gently out of erect grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescue with a minimum of bruising. And for a severe bludgeoning of the old sod, flails much like a hammermill literally beat the vegetation to pieces. Where the lawn is little else than coarse grass clumps the flail might be used first, possibly followed by soil slicing to provide lodging sites for new seed.

Of course there is no guarantee that the varieties newly provided by overseeding will gain the upper hand or even prosper. But at least you will have introduced select grass with the possibility of upgrading the lawn. Mechanical renovation certainly affords seed a better chance for gaining a toehold than if simply

cast upon untreated turf. And in breaking up whatever thatch there may have been, fertilization is made more efficient. The granules are thus more easily accessible to soil and rootzone.

Tailored Grasses

Incidentally, there are many new varieties of fine turfgrass, often tailored for a particular kind of performance. Fylking 0217 brand, low-growing bluegrass out of Scandinavia, is first becoming available in quantity this year; it may prove useful as a companion for Colonial bentgrass in closely mowed fairways and for disease-resistant sod. Where well adapted, Merion still reigns as queen of bluegrass varieties, although, like Windsor, it suffers stripe smut in certain regions. Old-line natural bluegrass from Kentucky is now certified as Kenblue, while Arboretum is a similar mixed population out of Missouri. Park, famed for fast-sprouting is a composite from Minnesota. Prato is another attractive European selection while Newport and Cougar are workhorse varieties originated in our own Northwest.

There are new lawn fescues, too, Chewings, Illahee, Pennlawn and Rainier being joined by Highlight, Oasis, and others. Seeded bentgrasses are rather few, with Penncross the favorite creeping type, and Highland the most used of the Colonials (Astoria and Exeter are other recognized names). Kingstown is a velvet bent for meticulously kept speciality turf. These are but a few of the specially bred fine turf possibilities your seedsman might recommend for introducing new blood into the lawn during its mechanical renovation.