

HOW MERION BLUEGRASS WAS PROMOTED TO NUMBER 1

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PPROMOTION of Merion Kentucky Bluegrass has been a process of carefully selecting ideas, proceeding step by step in a consistent program, and adopting new projects each year to supplement those found most effective. Promotion really began in 1954.

We started with the establishment of trial grounds in various parts of the country to establish authority for recommendations in planting and maintenance.

Here was a new grass that had to be handled in a way all its own.

We honored the men who had pioneered in the development of Merion: Joe Valentine, its discoverer, Burt Musser of Penn State and Dr. Fred Grau.

To show of its beauty, and for publicity purposes, Merion sod was installed at the "House & Garden" model home for the first time. Naturally, magazine and newspaper articles played their part in the campaign. The first trade ads appeared and the first cultural folder was produced. The year culminated

in the production of a film which could still be used.

Technical Bulletins

In 1955, technical bulletins were produced based on the trial ground work. The M.B.A. story was carried to trade meetings, and the first sales aids were developed. Grants were made to Penn State and Purdue for the study of rust, which had reared its head. The first newspaper ads were scheduled, visits were paid to dealers, the film went into distribution, and the booklet "The Greatest of the Grasses" was issued embodying all of the latest research.

Visits to the trial grounds were on the agenda in 1956. An exhibit was staged at the Garden Supply Merchandiser Show, and a talk on merchandising given at the American Seed Trade Association Convention. That was the year when the officers and Board of Directors went down to the Madras area; the growers there were refusing to be taxed without representation. We put on a repeat of the annual meeting that will never be forgotten by those in attendance—and the growers gave their support once again. For the first time, Australia began

to promote B-27, the name that is still used in commerce by that continent. B-27 has now been planted in every capital.

In 1957, the technical bulletins were stepped up. Revisions had to be made in the booklet "The Greatest of the Grasses." The first magazine ads were scheduled, plus heavy newspaper insertions. The Long Island Garden Show, for the first time, featured Merion sod in every garden. Our film was shown on television in a number of cities. Competition with Common Kentucky Bluegrass had to be met, and our growers and members needed stimulation; the first version of the brochure on the Merion Bluegrass Association thus came into being.

The next year we gathered together endorsements by turf authorities in different parts of the country. A three-page spread in *LOOK* Magazine on Yankee Stadium appeared and was merchandised. Fenway Park in Boston installed Merion sod. For the first time, I talked before golf course superintendents at the Massachusetts Turf Conference held at Amherst. Lower prices were now in effect, and the fall campaign was accelerated. Before the advent of Merion, a spring campaign was considered more important.

Education for Better Sales

In 1959, it was apparent that sales clerks needed more education for better sales. The special brochure produced for this purpose was widely distributed. As a result of endorsements by turf authorities, two posters were developed, one on Testimonials and the other called "Ten Reasons," which are still useful. The consumer had many questions about the new grass; we analyzed the ten most frequently asked questions, and their answers became the basis of the leaflet "Care and Maintenance." Our grass even became part of the National Flower competition.

In 1960 the same procedure was followed of researching the ten most often asked questions and their answers on planting, which led to a companion brochure. With lower prices, mixtures could be upgraded, and for that reason the spring campaign was stepped up. Greater competition now existed with the advent of Park and Newport. Another new technique was initiated with the Lawn News series of radio recordings, produced for spring and fall seasons, and regularly utilized by almost 200 stations even today.

Each year our editorial approach has been consistent throughout the

planting seasons according to the theme adopted for the time. In 1961, we featured athletics, with the idea that the home gardener could take advantage of the grass chosen by the professionals and by their methods. The Long Island Garden Show was still being sodded with Merion in every garden.

Television Promotion Began

In 1962, a new television project was inaugurated—to augment the successful radio promotion. This took the form of a script and illustrative material for the program director to employ with ease; a similar technique continues with variations that have had film and color slides for illustration to take advantage of the increased number of color TV sets. Summarizing the years of promotion, the "Merion Motivation" brochure was issued for trade distribution. A larger fall budget was again adopted.

The next year we found it necessary to change recommendations in cultural practices. "The Greatest of the Grasses" was again revised after checking the changes with turf experts in different parts of the country. That was the year when the White House lawn was sodded and we had some extraordinary publicity coverage. The Mets Shea Stadium adopted Merion—a good grass, but a poor club then. Model home promotions were instituted by Jacobson Mfg. Co. and we cooperated in the project.

Famous Lawns Covered

In 1964 an acme of publicity was reached — *LIFE* Magazine had a spread on the White House lawn and quoted the White House gardener on his practices with Merion. As you can imagine, this was well merchandised. Then the New York World's Fair adopted the grass as the grass of the Fair; this became the theme of our activities. In fact, we did a radio broadcast right from the grounds, and the Fair scenes were featured in the television offering. Up to this point, activities were centered on the promotion of seed; a change in policy is now beginning to include sod. Assistance was given to the development of the first sod farm literature, and sod was being mentioned along with seed for model home promotions and other projects.

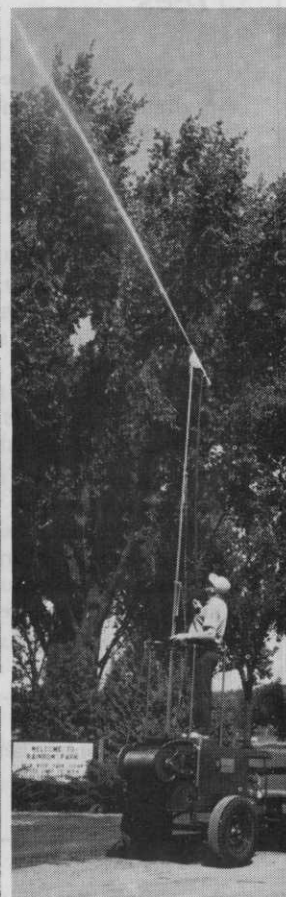
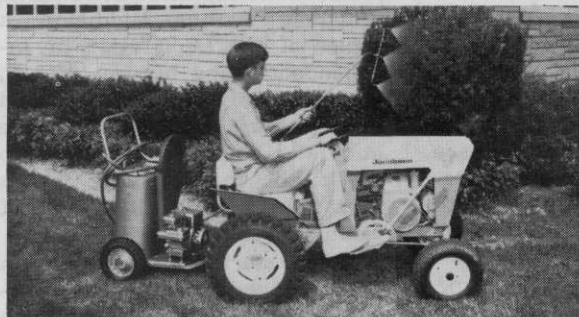
We have now come to 1965, the second year of the fair. Miss Merion Bluegrass, the hydroplane, was named and became a part of the promotion. A quiz kit was produced for clubs and schools including

slides, a recording, script and booklet material. Eleven years have passed in this chronicle during which time there had not been a noticeable increase in production. Suddenly this prima donna of a grass produced a heavier crop. We always operate on the money raised from the previous year, and careful appraisal had to be given to the program. The budget also had to include sodding promotion. The first booklet was then produced on Merion Bluegrass sod after consultation not only with turf experts, but also

with sod experts. This was a mammoth job—to coordinate all of the regional differences in opinion and performance.

Sod Boom and Seed Quality

In 1966, the editorial material now pertains to seed and sod. New advertising mats on sod were offered to the trade. There was a most spectacular increase in crop production. This was also the year of the drought, and when it was discovered that Merion was so drought resist-



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Nursery Plants Acorns From Famous Trees



A CORNS from the famous Middleton Oak are being cultivated in a Texas nursery. The progeny will be sold under the registered trademark, "Heritage Oak."

On a visit to Charleston, S. C., last spring, nursery owner Wash Storm, Jr., and his wife visited Middleton Place to see the stately tree—a landmark in America's oldest landscaped gardens—estimated to be near its 1,000th birthday by the Charleston Museum.

"We read a description of the Middleton Oak and wanted to see it. We've been interested in selecting acorns from trees with historical significance for some time," the Storms explained.

Among the approximately 150,000 trees growing on their tree farm, there are off-spring of the Davy Crockett tree at the Alamo in San Antonio, Tex.; the Goose Island Oak, Goose Island State

Park, Texas, and "Oak Alley" in Vachery, La.

Historically, the Middleton Oak can hold its own. It was an Indian Trail Tree long before Columbus discovered America. In later centuries, it gave shade to successive generations of the Middleton family and their guests—including Henry Middleton, president of the First Continental Congress; Arthur Middleton, a signer of the Declaration of Independence; and his son, Henry, a governor of South Carolina and Ambassador to Russia. Since Middleton Place was opened to the public in the 1930s, it has been admired by thousands of visitors each year.

Storm started his nursery in 1938, suspending operations during World War II. He served in the Air Force for 4 years. In 1969 he sold more than 12,000 trees primarily to nurseries and landscapers. Orders for 1970 are even

greater with one shipment earmarked for the LBJ Library at the University of Texas. Other famous buyers are Disney World in Orlando, Fla., Six Flags Over Texas and the Texas Governor's Mansion in Austin.

Since opening the nursery, Storm has experimented with methods to produce fast-growing oaks. He relies on careful selection rather than hybridizing methods. He raises several varieties of oak as well as other trees and shrubs, but his concentration is on the live oak.

Discussing the growth potential of the live oak, Storm estimates that a fledgling with a trunk measuring one and one half inches in diameter may—within a decade—grow to a height of 15 to 20 feet and have a diameter measuring eight to 10 inches, but "only if the tree is properly planted and cared for."

An example of Storm's success with live oaks stands in the yard of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Carroll of Premont, Tex. Storm planted the tree in 1941. Today it has a circumference of almost seven feet near the base and a trunk diameter of nearly 28 inches.

The Middleton Oak acorns, he reports, are doing very well at this stage of their growth. Another shipment, gathered by high school students, will soon go into the fertile Texas earth. Some of the acorns are planted in fields, the others in four-inch pots. The young trees will be sold to beautify landscapes hundred of miles from their Ashley River home.

ant, this theme was played up.

The following year, going back to our authorities, it was confirmed that Merion was still the No. 1 grass. More new grasses were appearing on the market, and we needed this research information to carry on an effective campaign. Merion became the grass of Expo '67 in Montreal, as it had been at other fairs. The sod boom was on, more and more stadiums were installing Merion sod, and our TV featurette played up sod in color. Our boat "Miss Merion Bluegrass" had its play when it won the Orange Bowl Regatta and was seen on network television.

As a result of the research of the previous year, the booklet "Merion Still First" was conceived and widely distributed. Our members and

growers needed pepping up and the Merion seal program was adopted. Foreign seed was coming in that contained poa annua; it became necessary to call attention to the superiority of Northwest-grown seed in various ways, including carrying the message to golf course architects. Color slides were used for the first time in the television featurettes.

In 1969, special mailings were directed to the sod growers. A second sodding booklet going into aspects of maintenance became necessary, due to the large amount of mail on that subject. Competition was increasing from other new grasses; a study was begun on the best mixtures with Merion and these new grasses. Our crop this year had returned to a lower figure; but the

all-time sales figure of a disappearance of more than five million pounds had been achieved. The spring theme became a tie-in with National Lawn & Garden Week, a promotion instituted by the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

And now we are approaching the present. Before this, competition had been with other natural grasses. Suddenly the Houston Astrodome and artificial turf came into the news. As a public service, the Association has just published a booklet on the advantages and disadvantages of artificial turf and real grass; copies are available.

The complicated subject of regional adaptation of mixtures is still before us. But one thing is certain, "Merion is Still First."