

Positive results reported from study of IPM on home lawns

A two-year project by the North Dakota State extension service proves lawn care customers will change bad habits if you show them how.

by Ronald C. Smith, Ph.D.

■ A two-year study of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) on 20 homelawns by the North Dakota University extension service has proven the effectiveness of IPM when it's done right.

The project was started in conjunction with two local lawn care companies, ChemLawn and Outdoor Services.



Ryobi Mulchinator runs 90 minutes on a full charge. Ryobi is in Anderson, SC.

EXCLUSIVE BIOTURF NEWS CASE STUDY REPORT

Clients were picked based on their willingness to cooperate with extension service recommendations.

Test lawns were equally divided between the two companies because of other clientele commitments, and the time required to begin the program. Some customers expressed concern that IPM would cost more and yield poor results, and at first were suspect of company motives in the project.

After being assured that the objective was mutual education, they were willing to change past bad habits.

Understanding IPM. Integrated Pest Management involves the consideration to pest control and turf management. Pesticides are not eliminated, but are a part of the management scheme to achieve the desired outcome: a healthy, functional and attractive turfgrass system.

Since the lawn care companies did not provide turnkey services, the homeowner was made to realize that their practices of mowing and watering could negate the best efforts of these professionals.

IPM programs start with an inventory of the property. This includes:

- a list of problem areas;
- client concerns and desires;
- a soil test, the linchpin for most initial decisions apart from mowing and watering.

Proper turfgrass mix. Turfgrass species in our region are all cool-season grasses: Kentucky bluegrass, creeping fescues and perennial rye. Some lawns are sodded with three or four cultivars of elite bluegrass; one is a monoculture of *Touchdown* Kentucky bluegrass, and another was a tall fescue blend.

One of the challenges in lawn care is to find a mix of grass seed that will be a good overseeder without differing substantially from the existing turfgrass. Since most of our clients had elite turfgrass mixes, an "IPM Mixture" was developed that met most of those needs and differing conditions. The mix contained three bluegrass cultivars: *Glade*, *Cynthia* and *Rugby*, and a single cultivar of perennial ryegrass, *Regal*. This mix provided quick germination growth in sun or shade and tolerance to a variety of conditions.

New mowing practices. Clients were instructed in the proper way to mow:

- mow at three inches high to keep weeds down;
- keep the blades sharp;
- mow frequently, based on turf growth rates, not a calendar;
- leave the clippings.

Customers were also encouraged to alternate mowing patterns to minimize compaction and encourage more upright growth.

The program used a Ryobi Mulchinator—a rotary mower powered by a 24-volt battery. It runs quieter than a household vacuum, mulches turf clippings and leaves, and can run

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