

## Motivating moss

*Many of my residential landscape clients live in shady old neighborhoods. These shady lawns are becoming mostly moss, which looks better than the grass, so we would rather have all moss and no grass. How do I plant more moss and where can I purchase it?*

— OHIO

Encouraging moss growth is relatively simple: rake, sweep, pack and wait. Mosses prefer shade and most prefer acid soils, but if you have mosses growing already, you have mosses which like the site as it is.

To establish moss in a new site, a soil test at a shallow root depth should have a pH around 5.5. You increase the acidity of the soil with aluminum sulfate or ferrous sulfate, which takes about two to three weeks to take effect, while sulfur dust or chips take two to three months to become effective and must be applied after the soil warms up (late May). Scrape away the grass to apply the chemical, as it can take up to six months to take effect when applied with the turf in place.

To encourage moss growth, pull out the grasses. Sweep clean and roll the surface (if needed), as moss grows best on a smooth, firm, clay soil surface. You do not need to be aggressive in compacting—a firm tamping should be sufficient. Keep the site moist (not wet) until you see a green film. A light daily sprinkling should be sufficient, but not so heavy that the soil erodes.

Moss is easy to transplant. Simply take a piece and press it into the new location. Site preparation is easy too—just scratch the soil to loosen lightly, before you place the moss. Pat the moss down firmly and keep it watered for a week. Take small pieces of moss and place them where you desire the moss to grow.

Another technique is to take some moss, crumble it and place the fragments on moist soil or peat. Cover the moss with cheesecloth and keep moist. Within a few weeks you should have a carpet of moss. The moss can then be cut into pieces and placed in the desired location (the cheesecloth disintegrates).

Moss benefits from follow-up care. Protect it from heavy leaf fall and leaf collection. One method is to lay plastic mesh netting on the ground (prior to leaf fall) and use it to lift the leaves off the moss. Leave the mesh on through the winter and use it to remove any debris from the moss in the spring.

Locations for purchasing moss are limited, and if you have mosses already on-site you may be better off encouraging them. However, Bernie Margolis grows mosses in West Bloomfield, MI and can be reached at his business, China Center, at 248/788-7790. Margolis also recommends fertilization a couple of times a season with an organic, high N liquid fertilizer, such as Rapid Grow, for an extra boost.

## Not apple scab

*We are seeing some red to tan leaf spots on a number of crabapple trees in our city streets. Any idea of what this might be? It is not apple scab. It is more prevalent on older trees. How can we control this?*

—OHIO

Based on your description of the leaf spot symptom, it appears to be a fungal disease caused by *Phylospora malorum*. This disease is also called "Frog eye" leaf spot. This disease is reportedly severe, particularly on older trees. When this disease is severe, extensive defoliation can occur as the season progresses. As you mentioned, the leaf spots would be tan with a well defined purple border.

I have also noticed some leaves with purple discoloration without any distinct border. I don't think that these are related to "Frog eye" leaf spot. These are probably associated with nutrient deficiency and need further research.

To manage the problem consider using fungicides labeled for apple scab such as Cleary's 3333, Banner, Rubigan, etc. Also purchase disease-resistant crabapple trees for further plantings. **LM**



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