



LAWNS -- MOSS AND ALGAE

Moss and Algae – Moss and Algae are primitive, low-growing green plants that sometimes occur in lawns. Lawns that are well maintained and fertilized are not usually infested with moss or algae. The presence of these weeds is usually associated with low fertility, poor drainage, high soil acidity, too much shade, soil compaction, improper watering, or a combination of two or more of these factors. Thus, these plants grow best under conditions where grass grows poorly if at all.

Causes – To determine the cause of moss or algae in your lawn; first observe the area where they grow. If it is shady or the soil is hard and poorly drained, these problems are usually apparent. Shady areas must either be planted to shade tolerant grasses such as creeping fescues or some of the plant growth that is causing shade must be pruned away to allow more sunlight to reach the soil. Loosen compact soils by working compost or peat moss into the soil prior to seeding; this will also improve poor drainage that may be due to compaction. If poor drainage is due to a high water table then other measures, such as tile drains must be employed to solve the problem.

Poor Soil – If the cause of your moss or algae problem is not apparent, then have a sample of soil tested for acidity and nutrients. Soil testing can be done either by your County Extension Service or by means of one of the commercial kits now available. Necessary limestone and fertilizer can be added to problems soils prior to reseeding with grass.

Reseed – There are several ways to eliminate moss and algae from the lawn, but the most practical is to scrape off these plants then correct the conditions causing this growth and reseed with perennial grasses. Moss and algae can be killed by applying ammonium sulfate to burn the plants or by spraying with copper sulfate, a fungicide, but removal of the moss or algae is still necessary before reseeding. Always remember these weeds will grow back again if the conditions causing them are not corrected.

Proper lawn maintenance is the best way to prevent moss and algae infestation in your lawn.

Adapted from “Moss and Algae in Lawns” by H. Thurston Handley, Jr. Middlesex County Cooperative Extension

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