

## Author's Foreword: New Day for Lawns

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Ten years ago much of the lawn culture material presented here could not have been put down. The research on which it is based was hardly more than a gleam in the scientist's eye. But now at last we have basic facts that will enable us to discuss grass not as an element in the diet of cattle, but grass as the homeowner grows it—in a mown turf.

Until recently, research work on turf grasses fell under the direction of agronomists, whose training was entirely in forage crops. Occasionally, as in the pioneer work at the University of Rhode Island under Dr. J. A. de France, some forward-looking institution would permit a forage-crops man to carry on turf-grass work on the side. Often, this became a case of the tail wagging the dog, and a full-blown research program developed. Only within the past decade, however, has grass as an element in ornamental horticulture gained major status in the eyes of university and experiment station administrators.

This enlarged research interest has brought vital progress in lawn-weed control, nutrition, grass breeding and general turf culture in our country. The growth-regulating chemical, 2,4-D, about which I first wrote in 1945, was actually the first of a number of pace-setting discoveries.

An article or book about lawns written in 1880, in 1890, or 1900 would have differed very little from one written in 1940. Excluding some minor refinements in mowing and tilling equipment, no major progress was made during that span of years. Except for the introduction of several vegetatively produced strains of bentgrass, and the introduction of Chewing's fescue from New Zealand during Queen Victoria's reign, not a single grass species suitable for turf purposes was distributed commercially in the century before 1940.

### THE OLD YET NEW DAYS

This lack of progress was brought home to me forcibly during the past three years by an opportunity I had to examine the seed stock books of four commercial seed houses, all established before 1900. I found that all four firms sold exactly the same species of grasses in 1895 that they sold, for example, in 1955. Of the four, only one is today offering any species of grass newer than those sold to my grandfather in 1870. One firm offers, and not without some pride, the exact seed mixture of common Kentucky

bluegrass, redtop and perennial rye that it sold in 1883.

Part of our trouble also lies in the fact that we have inherited most of our garden practices—good and bad alike—from the British. We are seeding and caring for lawns by methods originated in England 300 years ago. They were probably right for that time and place, but do not fit the entirely different conditions found today in our country. Consider, for example, the mild British climate, where outdoor drain pipes seldom freeze and where roses bloom well into December, and then consider the weather conditions in New England, the North Central States and other regions where sub-zero winters are common. Thanks to a greater awareness of such differences, we are becoming more selective in our attitude toward British lawn-making practices.

Another good sign is that our turf scientists are taking a critical look at organic fertilizer and its relation to turf diseases. We are no longer forced to accept lawn fertilizers based on formulae developed to nourish corn and soy beans. We can now buy turf foods that provide exactly what our lawns need, not what some agronomist decided to use on corn half a century ago.

#### IN THE BEGINNING

The home gardener, except for his willingness to accept and pay for the improvements, has had little to do with their development. Most of them were made possible by the demands of golf course greenskeepers, who fought for years for help on turf problems. They were largely responsible for setting up some of the country's first scientific lawn research. The trial plots were originally in Arlington, Virginia, on the exact spot now occupied by the Pentagon. When that monstrous building destroyed the original trials, the work was moved to the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Plant Industry Station in Beltsville, Maryland. Much of this important work was financed by the golf interests, who paid the salaries of the staff and discovered many of the grasses used for study.

The original work on both Merion Kentucky bluegrass and Meyer zoysia was done at Beltsville. The first fine-leaved Bermuda grass, U-3, was tested there. Thus today's new lawn culture might not have been possible if the golf interests had not financed these basic studies.

#### HELP AT LAST

Only within the past few years has the American homeowner—the forgotten man of horticulture—been given any consideration by state and federal research centers. I am amazed that no politician has discovered

what a tremendous vote-pulling appeal he would have if he advocated federal help for homeowners with lawn problems!

I have been privileged to watch the development of many lawn discoveries, to carry on some studies of my own, and to play some part in bringing new light on growing better lawns to home gardeners. As a result of my writing on various aspects of turf, I am regularly overwhelmed with letters and phone calls asking for help on lawn problems. I have concluded that even many long-time gardeners do not fully appreciate the infinitely variable factors involved in grass growth, or that the soil in which grass grows is a far more complex and difficult-to-understand "organism" than their own wonderfully contrived bodies. This is why a lawn specialist, when asked a specific question, can do little more than set up general principles and make an educated guess at the elements that might be involved in the particular problem or situation. This book discusses and throws fresh light on all the known facts and principles of lawn culture, plus quite a few new and "revolutionary" ones. But, to repeat, there is no such thing as a standard lawn. Each situation differs—if only slightly. If you keep these conditions in mind, this book can be your ticket to a lawn that will be, as they say in the advertisements, "the envy of your neighborhood."

R. MILTON CARLETON

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