Organic Lawn Care

By Diane Meucci Sept/Oct 1995

Wonderful gardens are not made by exclaiming, 'Oh, how lovely' and sitting in the shade.

Author unknown and possibly misquoted

Lawn care. Boring! True. My apologies. Regrettably I have discovered all too many good citizens of Memphis either ignoring the issue entirely (okay with me) or without a blink telling me the next spray date of their chemical lawn company.

These are sensitive loving people! They know not what they do. It is a case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. They shop at health food store, work out at the gym, do random acts of kindness, then hop into their cars (carbon monoxide), turn on the air conditioner (fluorocarbons) and go home to spray their lawns (words I can't pronounce, words they don't even know!).

You know who "they" are. They are not ghetto kids with no fathers. Russian scientists living underground, militia group members (well, maybe a few) or card-carrying commies. It's you and me! Us! We!

Okay. I have a lot of conflicts about just how much I am willing to trade in personal comfort for, pardon the expression, "The Environment"...but this one is easy.

Stop. Today. Call your chemical lawn service and cancel. Suggest a new name: "Nature's Nurture Organic Lawn Care." Insist on a better product. Be a revolutionary. It is a small step for you and a giant leap for mankind.

Need I remind you of the litany of toxins you use before you even leave the bathroom each morning? You can do this. Let it go. Today. End of sermon. Amen.

So now you are standing in your large field of green — naked, trembling, the past behind you and the future uncertain. What do I do now?" Relax. Take a Valium. I'm here with you. Okay, here is one thing you can do. You are only one person, right? If you do nothing else, do this:

Grow winter rye grass! If you grow winter rye grass you will inadvertently, naturally , if you will, also practice organic lawn care. It's cheap, it's easy and your lawn will thrive.

In addition to winter rye use:
"Corn Gluten Meal"
an organic "weed and feed." Apply Feb. 15/April 15/Sept. 15. Available at "Gardens Alive."
812-537-8650.
http://www.gardensalive.com/

How to Grow Winter Rye Grass

You need: one pound winter rye grass for every 1000 square feet of lawn; 50 pounds of dolomite limestone, AKA lime; a rake; a bucket or a fancy lawn fertilizer spreader; water; a mower or mowing service (Note: you need to communicate with your mowing service from time to time about mowing height and frequency); to sow seed any time from September 1 to November 15. It's best before the leaves fall (September).

Step by step here's what you need to do:

1. Mow lawn short.
2. Rake vigorously. You should do this twice a year anyway!
3. Mix seed in bucket with dolomite limestone (wear gloves and a bandana or mask).
4. Spread evenly, by hand from bucket or with fancy fertilizer spreader. Stay on lawn, not in landscape beds!
5. Water. Three times for 20 minutes each the first week; one time for one hour a week until November.
6. Mow as needed. This is probably your best organic lawn care tool. From November through February your winter rye grass will need at least eight mowings. It will grow when temperatures are above 40 degrees and stop growing when they drop below 40 degrees. Fall and winter mowing is pleasant. You'll like it. It's surreal.

Again, even if you don't grow winter rye grass, fall/winter/early spring mowing is critical to organic lawn care. When the bermuda and zoysia stop growing the weeds have a great opportunity to receive water, light and cool temperatures: perfect for germination.

I notice that the good citizens of Memphis discontinue mowing at this time and instead grow wildflowers, AKA weeds, in the late fall to early spring to save money or labor. Then they call a chemical lawn service to eradicate their wildflower meadows, AKA weeds. All summer, Jekyll and Hyde. You've got to decide: wildflower meadows or lawn.

The addition of winter rye grass to consistent mowing throughout the year as needed will act as a ground cover to suppress weeds, aerate your soil, increase worm count, add nitrogen from the grass clippings, increase potassium levels, feel good, look good, and may bring about world peace.

So, that's it! "Sow it. Mow it. Grow it." Your new mantra.

As Siddhartha finally figured out after denying himself everything and meditating for ten years, consistency and moderation are key! Grow winter rye grass *every year*! If you skip a step, you shortchange yourself.

Ask Siddhartha.