

Cultural Control of Mosses in the Lawn

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Mosses can occur on soils, on tree trunks and branches, on rocks, and in water. For the most part because they contain chlorophyll and make their own food, they do not directly injure the plant on which they grow. Heavy growth however may have a “suffocating” effect and can reduce the sunlight reaching the leaves. Moss removal products for lawns are sold on the market, but provide only a temporary solution to the problem. Long term solutions may be achieved by altering the environment in which mosses prefer to grow.

Control

Moss in shaded areas – A natural environment for moss is shady, damp areas. Changing the environment by selectively pruning surrounding vegetation to improve light and aeration is one way of gaining control. If shade is provided by a permanent structure such as building, consider incorporating the moss into the landscape as part of shade garden. Using the area to plant a shade or woodland garden with moss covered stones, etc. can be an attractive addition to the home landscape.

Moss in sunny location – Moss in a sunny location can indicate soil compaction, low pH, or poor fertility, all of which can be corrected by cultural practices.

- Compacted soil- Core aerating in the spring and fall followed by an application of no more than ¼” of compost to the area will help loosen the soil and build organic matter. Spring aeration is the most important if only one application can be applied per year.
- Low pH- If a soil test indicates a pH problem, adding sulfur to the soil lowers the pH level, and adding lime raises the pH level. Ideally the soil pH for lawns is from 7.0 – 6.5
- Poor fertility can be corrected by adapting a lawn care program to meet the needs of the soil. Proper fertilization and watering practices are important. A mowing height of 2 ½” – 3” is recommended for lawns containing blue grass, and leaving grass clippings on the lawn adds both fertilizer and water back into the soil. -See the flyer on Basic Lawn Care for more details.

(Some information taken from WSU Extension Bulletin EB 1050)