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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Saturday, March 9, 1940.

(For Broadcast Use Only)

Subject: "Dandelions in Lawns." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

(NOTE: This is to replace the Homemakers' Chat originally mailed for March 9 release.)

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Dandelions may be good spring tonic for humans, but not for lawns. And when you cut off young dandelion stalks for a dish of greens, you are directly inviting lawn trouble, because new tops spring up quickly from the cut surface of the "crown." A shallow-cut dandelion root sends out 2 or 4 sprouts where there was one before. If you are going to cut, cut deep.

If you don't already know what unrestrained dandelions can do to a lawn, remember that the dandelion is a perennial. It comes up every year from a stout taproot. It may live ten years or more. When not crowded, the root divides at the crown into as many as 15 or 20 leafy branches. Each branch may send up six or eight flower heads- and each head may produce 250 seeds. So a well-established dandelion plant may produce 25,000 or more seeds a year. A heavily infested lawn will average 50 thousand seeds per square yard. Each seed has a feathery "pappus" for carrying it on the wind, so the dandelion is marvelously equipped to propagate itself.

Furthermore, plant scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say that the dandelion is one of the few flowering plants that set seed without fertilization- another way the plant assures itself of seed production. The seed ripens as soon as the feathery white pappus begins to show above the green tips of the flower envelope. So if you find a few stray dandelions in the lawn later in the season, prevent them from scattering seeds by cutting off the flowers as soon as the yellow petals fall.

Where there are a good many blooms on a lawn you can mow the heads off with a dandelion "rake". If you do this in time it prevents the weed from going to seed.

If your lawn is not too large, the obvious way to get rid of dandelions is to dig them out by hand. Take a spud, or an asparagus knife, a sharpened piece of an automobile spring, or some other tool that will dig deep enough- more than 2 inches. Cutting works better if you drop a pinch of salt or ammonium sulfate on the exposed cut end of each root.

When the ground is soft after a rain, you can pull out small and medium-sized plants bodily, by means of an old 12-inch flat file. Push the handle of the file down into the dandelion root from the side and lift the plant out with a prying motion. Or you might use a linoleum knife or one of the patented implements made for lifting out dandelions.

However, there are other ways of getting rid of dandelions in a lawn,- by direct attack, with chemicals, or by indirect attack, through improving the vigor of the grass. Although the results of the indirect method are less immediately evident than the results from direct spraying or digging, the indirect method is often cheaper, more effective, and more lasting. It works by the simple process of strengthening the growth of the regular lawn grass.

Many lawn soils lack nitrogen. Dandelions and other weeds get a good foothold in the lawn chiefly because the grass is too weak to resist them. If you apply a good grass fertilizer generously, it will help the grass choke out the weeds. Use 5 to 8 pounds of good commercial fertilizer per thousand square feet of lawn. Spread this amount in April and again in September, and "let nature take her course." Any dealer in garden or farm supplies can furnish a proper grass fertilizer relatively high in nitrogen.

After you improve the vigor of the turf with fertilizer, don't mow too closely. It won't keep the dandelions down because they can exist under very close clipping. Allow bluegrass, in particular, to grow at least 2 inches tall.

But you may prefer the direct attack on the dandelions. You can kill them either in mass by spraying the lawn with a suitable chemical weed killer, or individually, by treating each plant with a chemical. Spraying the infested lawn with water-white kerosene is a treatment which is often effective if the spraying is done in cool weather, using 2 quarts of the kerosene to 100 square feet of lawn. But the Department specialists warn that spraying in hot mid-summer weather with kerosene may be definitely harmful to the lawn. And be sure to use high-grade and colorless kerosene. Low-grade kerosene is harmful.

Several chemicals have been suggested for spraying dandelions, but the Bureau of Plant Industry of the U. S. Department of Agriculture has not yet finished testing them. Iron sulfate is no longer recommended as highly as it used to be. It is true that it will kill or injure a high percentage of the weeds, but it also blackens the grass. The grass recovers at first better than the dandelions, but a second or third treatment with iron sulfate will increase the injury to the grass.

Another common recommendation is dusting the lawn with dry ammonium sulfate or calcium cyanimid. These are well-known fertilizer materials. They are used at the rate of 6 pounds to each thousand square feet, applied when the soil is dry, but the weeds covered with dew. These chemicals are mixed with sand or compost for uniform spreading. They turn both grass and weeds brown, but the grass soon recovers. However, you may need to repeat the treatment at two week intervals. It would be a good plan to try the treatment on a small plot first.

If you have only a few scattered dandelions in the lawn you can treat them individually. Use an oil can, a large medicine dropper, a small round paint brush or a patent applicator to reach the hearts of the plants. Give each one a "dose" of half a teaspoonful of any of the following: Gasoline, kerosene, fuel oil, ammonium sulfate, furfural, sulfuric acid, hydrochloric acid, sodium chlorate, sodium arsenite, or arsenic acid. Whichever way you try to get rid of dandelions, you will need to keep after them continually. Eternal vigilance is the price of a smooth, weed-free lawn.

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