

# The Garden Corner

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With all the rain we have been getting, more and more of our residents have been writing to ask: “How do I get rid of the moss in my yard?” Before providing some helpful tips on killing moss, I have a question that may lead to another approach: Why not just leave the moss alone? There are a number of reasons for my attitude concerning moss. First, it’s a native plant that loves shade. It’s pretty to look at. It makes a wonderful ground cover. And, except in extreme drought, it doesn’t require a lot of water. Ok, that is the case for keeping moss in your landscape. If you absolutely have to eliminate the plant here is what you need to know.

Just like any other plant, it is useful to be aware of the condition which combine to produce excellent growth. By eliminating the growth conditions, you create a hostile environment to successful growth. So, what does moss need to thrive? The most important element is moisture. Right on the heels of abundant moisture is shade. Some morning sunlight is fine; but, afternoon, direct sunlight will kill it deader than a door nail. Moss will not grow in alkaline soil – it prefers a pH of 5 to 5.5. And, unlike many of the jewels we plant in our yards, moss likes poorly drained soil and is particularly fond of our hard, compacted clay dirt. Equipped with this knowledge, you now have all you need to know to eradicate moss from your estate. If you are intent on ridding your lawn of this green gangster, roll up your sleeves – you’ve got a lot of work ahead of you.

If the patch of moss is small, you could try spot applications of spraying Ultra Dawn dish detergent (two tablespoons of Dawn to a gallon of water). If the spot is large, try my Grandad’s

mixture: one cup of Listerine mouthwash, one cup of chamomile tea, and one cup of Murphy's Oil soap to twenty gallons of water. Both of these alternatives work really quickly and may require a second application. However, unless you change the growing environment, spraying year after year will become a ritual. A longer lasting approach would be changing the condition which lead to moss development. For example, raise the pH level of your yard with applications of lime. (Do I need to remind you to get a soil test before you go broadcasting chemicals or amendments willy-nilly about your home?) Or, trees can be pruned to allow more sunlight to reach the affected area. How long has it been since you aerated your lawn? Remember, moss loves compacted soil! The best time to aerate is the spring or fall, followed by reseeding with your favorite grass seed. I like a mixture of fescue and rye. What about fertilization? The experts say to have a lovely, lush, green yard; landowners need to fertilize in the spring, late spring, mid-summer, and again in the fall. These experts must have more money than sense! Have you seen the prices on fertilizer lately? But, lawns do need fertilizer and if you can afford one application, do it in the fall. By changing the growing conditions, you will eliminate the environment that allows moss to take hold. In the spirit of full disclosure, some research suggests spraying with a sulfate-based herbicide (e.g. iron sulfate) will do the trick; but the results are about evenly divided between pro and con.

This is just my opinion; but, this seems like a lot of work and expense to get rid of something that is pleasing to the eye, nice to walk on, doesn't need mowing, takes very little water, and is free! I'll leave you with that thought until next month. For your questions/concerns write to: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email: [maandpak@embarqmail.com](mailto:maandpak@embarqmail.com) and I'll get right back with you.