Ammonium Sulfate as a Help for Poor Lawns

By Alan D. Wilson

Some three years ago the Green Section experiments at Arlington made it quite clear that by the use of ammonium sulfate you could at one and the same time stimulate the growth of grass and discourage the growth of weeds; so we at once began to use it on the Merion greens with prompt and good effect and each succeeding year the results seemed to prove more and more satisfactory.

Ever since then I have been experimenting in a more or less casual and desultory way in an effort to find a safe and simple method of using it on small lawns.

On golf courses, we have the intelligent supervision of our greenskeepers, skilled labor, topdressing, and a watering system, and with such a combination it is a simple matter to choose the proper day or hour, mix your ammonium sulfate with topdressing, apply it to your greens and water it in.

However, with lawns—large or small—we generally have a very different situation. No supervision, unskilled labor in the shape either of the permanent or itinerant gardener or caretaker, no topdressing, and no way to get any, and seldom a watering system which will cover the entire area.

The following plan has been used with success and is suggested only because it more or less meets the above conditions, is extremely simple and fairly fool proof.

(1) Wait for a rainy day.

(2) When it comes, put a tumbler full of ammonium sulfate in the usual three-gallon watering can and fill the latter with water.

(3) Sprinkle this over a patch of lawn about 10 feet square and repeat the operation until you have covered the area desired.

The 10-foot square area requires no thought or care. From 100 to 150 sq. ft. is just the area the contents of a three-gallon can will normally cover put on with the usual nozzle.

A table glassful of ammonium sulfate weighs about half a pound, so this amount applied to 100 sq. ft. is at the rate of 5 pounds per thousand square feet. This is all right for spring or fall, but in warm weather when there is more danger of burning, you can reduce the dose, either by decreasing the amount of ammonium sulfate or by sprinkling less heavily and making each canful cover a patch say 15 feet square, which would reduce the dose to a little over 2 pounds per thousand feet.

There is one serious disadvantage to the plan; you can not apply it when you please but must wait for a rainy day. Still we are apt to have frequent rains spring and fall and this is the best and safest time to apply your ammonium sulfate.

If you have a water system which covers the entire area, you can avoid this disadvantage. Apply the ammonium sulfate as suggested above and then water it in but this must be done at once or you will burn your grass badly. You must promptly wash this solution entirely off the leaves of your grass or you will injure the plants instead of helping them.

Avoid applying the solution to the borders of flower beds at the edge of the turf.

As a test, I sprinkled a patch 10 feet square with this solution last spring and did not water it in at all. It burned the grass so badly that it has taken six months of careful effort to get it right again.

Another DON'T is: Do not apply ammonium sulfate where you have seeded until germination has taken place and the young grass is at least a month old. Before that time the grass is too young and tender to stand the stimulant. It would be like giving cocktails to children.

A side-issue use of ammonium sulfate is as a weed destroyer. If you have thick patches in the lawn of such broad-leaved pests as chick-weed, creeping Charlie, or pennywort, scatter the ammonium sulfate over them dry in its powdered form; then sprinkle lightly with water—not enough to wash the ammonium sulfate off the leaves but just enough to dissolve it. It burns them badly, and while it will not kill them all it does discourage them mightily and gives your grass a chance to grow.

The great majority of lawns get so little nourishment that we can safely say most of them are starved; the grass has not enough food to flourish and increase and so the weeds come to fill in the vacant places. Ammonium sulfate would help such situations tremendously and I hope this method may prove as useful to others as it has to me. Even if it can not be used over the entire lawn, it will be found valuable for use in small areas where it is difficult to make grass grow, such as the heavily shaded spots or in places where there is a good deal of wear.

Additional Experiments in Grub-Proofing Turf

By B. R. Leach and J. W. Lipp

The usual steps in turf maintenance, such as planting, mowing, topdressing, etc., are the cause of no serious trouble to the average well-informed greenkeeper of today. On the other hand, the problems of controlling brown-patch, grubs, worms, etc., are still problems of serious import to even the best informed greenkeepers. Such a condition is due to the fact that the study of grass itself has progressed over relatively long periods, whereas the study of insect and disease control has been undertaken seriously only during the past few years. Promising methods have been developed, but considerably more research must be done before these methods are complete.

The Green Section has given considerable support in the last few years to research in insect and disease control. It would seem that the pushing of this field of research should constitute one of the major duties of the Green Section. It has come to a point where not the growing of turf but the keeping of turf after it is grown is of pressing importance and the cause of more financial loss than any other phase of green keeping at the present time.