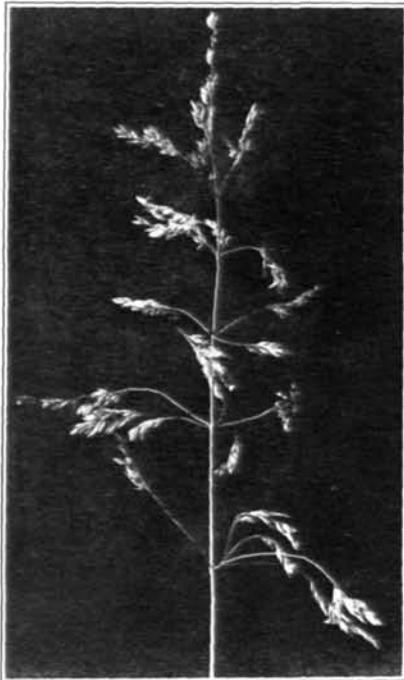


Harvesting Kentucky Bluegrass Seed

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Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) is easily the favorite grass for fairways, lawns, and pastures in the United States north of the Gulf states and east of Kansas. There are some soils in this region on which it will not grow well, but there are very few which can not be made suitable for it at moderate expense. The grass is unquestionably a native of the Old World, and was brought to America by the colonists. English and French traders and explorers of the 17th century are thought to have introduced it into Kentucky, but most of the credit for its introduction and distribution probably belongs to the settlers of the 18th century. Kentucky bluegrass thrives so well and is so widely grown in central Kentucky that the fame of the state is inseparably associated with it. On the extensive pastures of the bluegrass region are to be found not only the horses for which it is famous, but also well-bred cattle and sheep.



The compact clusters of seed and the slender stalks of Kentucky bluegrass lend themselves readily to the harvesting of the seed by means of the comb stripper

While most of the bluegrass in Kentucky is grown primarily for pasture, the bluegrass seed crop is a considerable item in the profit which the grass yields. In Kentucky the bluegrass seed crop is produced in a few counties near Lexington. The so-called "Missouri area" comprises the northwest corner of Mis-

souri with adjacent parts of Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. In Kentucky the fields from which seed is to be saved are pastured little or none in the spring. The seed ripens about the first of June and is harvested within a week or ten days. A good many years ago much seed was obtained by hand stripping, but at the present time only very small areas are so harvested, and the amount of such seed is insignificant, though its quality is usually of the highest.

Until very recent years, practically all the seed has been harvested in Kentucky by means of a



The hand stripper is still used to a slight extent in harvesting Kentucky bluegrass seed

stripper, which consists of a box swung low between two high wheels. The front side of the box is open and carries a steel comb along its edge. As the box is moved forward, the heads of the grass are combed off. Two men are necessary for the operation of such a stripper—one to drive the mule or horse and the other to draw the heads of grass from the comb back into the box. Much of Kentucky's seed crop is now harvested with an automatic stripper equipped with a reel which combs off the seed and, with the aid of canvas belts, places it in a box or bag. Not only does this machine harvest the seed more rapidly than the older comb stripper, but also dispenses with the labor of one man. In the Missouri-Iowa area all the seed is harvested by machines with reels which beat off the seed.



Stripping Kentucky bluegrass seed with the old-type comb stripper

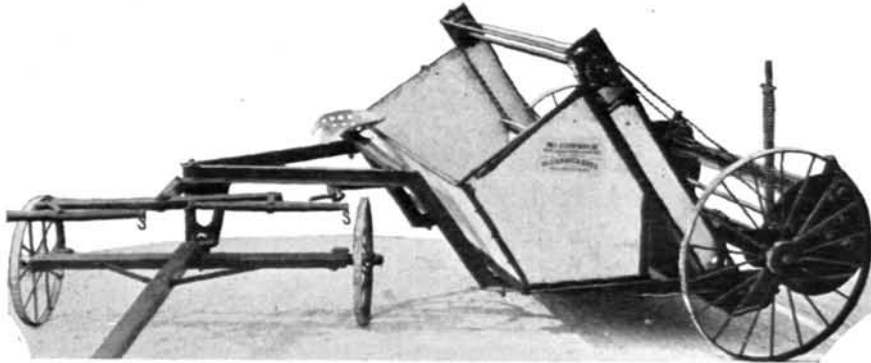
As soon as the seed is harvested, it is placed in large burlap bags and taken at once to the curing field or floor. There it is piled in long, narrow windrows about 2½ feet high. Since the green material would quickly become hot enough to kill the seeds and thus result in a low germination, the windrows must be turned frequently. At first this must be done three or four times daily, then as curing progresses fewer turnings are necessary. Formerly all curing was done in the open on closely clipped patches of bluegrass sod, but now much is cured on the large floors of loose-leaf tobacco warehouses of the regions. Curing requires from two to four weeks.



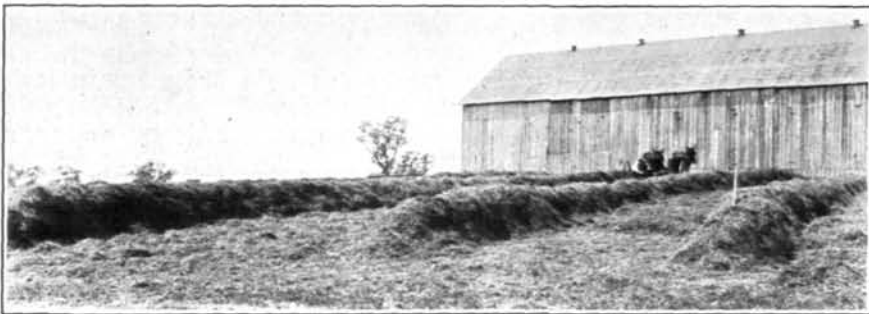
The seed of Kentucky bluegrass is gathered at once in large burlap bags, after being stripped, for transporting to the curing field or shed

Seed cleaning, the next step in preparing the market product, is in reality a combination of threshing and cleaning and requires elaborate and costly machinery. It will be recalled that the harvested material consists of seed in the chaff and associated portions of the stems. The cleaning process removes the seed from the other portions of the head in addition to cleaning the seed. The loss in weight from cleaning varies from 25 to 50 per cent, depending upon the maturity of the crop and the amount of chaff, straw, and weed seeds contained.

The cleaned seed goes on the wholesale market in 8-bushel burlap bags, which quantity, incidentally, is about an average yield to the acre in Kentucky. Retail dealers break these bags to meet the demand for small lots.



An automatic Kentucky bluegrass seed stripper



Stripped Kentucky bluegrass seed is piled in the open for curing. The windrows are turned by a man and team, alternate windrows being turned at a time

The legal weight of bluegrass seed is 14 pounds to the bushel, but the weight contained in a measured bushel varies from even less than 14 pounds to 21 pounds or even more, depending upon the maturity of the seed when harvested, the amount of weeds present, and other factors. Generally speaking, the heavier lots contain the best seed.

Scientific methods applied to the care of the soil, it is stated, have increased the productivity of the crop land in Pennsylvania 22 per cent over the 50-year period 1879 to 1929. On the other hand, in some sections of the country the replacing of plant foods in the soil, by fertilization, has been neglected to such an extent that the productivity of the soil has been decidedly reduced. Apparently Pennsylvania is keeping step with science by the use of high-grade fertilizers, improved cultural methods, rotation of crops, and better control of insects. Some of these modern improvements in agricultural practices are reflected on golf courses in a more intelligent use of fertilizers, seed, weed-control agencies, and cultural practices.