



**CORNELL  
COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION OF  
ONEIDA COUNTY**

# HOME GROWN FACTS

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## Controlling Moss and Algae in the Home Lawn

Moss and algae are present in lawns because conditions are not suitable for growing a dense, healthy turf. There are 13,000 or more mosses which constitute a large collection of lower plant life. Mosses are adapted to a wide range of environmental conditions--some grow well in dry areas, while other grows best in bog-like habitats. Algae are fresh-water plants and are sometimes mistaken for moss when found growing in moist areas under trees.

Mosses are small, leafy plants, which appear to be a mass of fine stems. They vary greatly in size and do not have roots, but rather form root-like filaments that attach to soil and other substratum.

Infestations of moss are associated with low fertility, poor drainage, too much shade, soil compaction, wet conditions, poor air circulation or a combination of these factors. Contrary to popular opinion, low soil pH is seldom responsible for moss invasion. Most moss species grow under a wide range of soil pH--however, some appear to be associated with acid and others with alkaline conditions. An application of agricultural lime is not likely to solve a moss problem; however, applying hydrated lime may cause injury by dehydrating or burning the moss plant.

### Cultural Control:

The only permanent control of moss consists of correcting the conditions unfavorable for grass growth.

- **Maintain Good Soil Fertility**--Make a soil test to determine corrective lime and fertilizer applications necessary to raise the soil fertility level to a desirable level. Apply maintenance fertilizer as needed
- **Improve Drainage**--Soils that are constantly wet because of poor drainage should be contoured so that water will drain away from the lawn. In some lawns, tile drainage may be necessary to correct wet conditions. Tile may be ineffective in heavy soils unless special precautions are taken to facilitate water movement to the tile system.
- **Provide for More Light**--In some cases a choice between trees and a good lawn must be made. If the lawn is completely shaded, removal of some of the least desirable trees may be the only answer in order to grow a good turf. Removal of low branches and thinning the crown of the trees may also allow enough light to reach the ground surface.

If sufficient limbs cannot be removed to provide for direct sunlight, a shade-tolerant grass may need to be planted. The fine fescues--Pennlawn, Biljart (C-26), common creeping red, chewings, etc.-- are best adapted to shade. Glade, A-34, Nuggett, Bristol and Birka Kentucky bluegrasses are more shade-tolerant than most other Kentucky bluegrasses. A Kentucky bluegrass-fine fescue mixture is preferred for shaded conditions.

- **Cultivate Compacted Soil**--Compacted soil may be loosened by cultivation and addition of large amounts of organic matter if the lawn is to be renovated. Aerification with a machine that removes plugs of soil will help a lawn where it is undesirable to till the soil surface.
- **Improve Air Circulation**--Low branched trees may be the cause of poor air circulation, as well as dense shade. Lawns surrounded by buildings and high vegetation with limbs close to the ground will require considerable effort to provide adequate air circulation to grow a good lawn.

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**Chemical Control:**

- **Ammonium Sulfate-** Apply 10 pounds per 1,000 sq. feet directly to the area when the moss is actively growing. Treatment of dormant moss will not be effective. Do not water in. Some grass burn is likely, but will not be permanent.
- **Copper Sulfate-** Dissolve three level tablespoons of powdered copper sulfate in five gallons of water and apply to 1,000 square feet. Copper sulfate will permanently stain clothes and is difficult to remove from skin. Wear gloves and old clothes when using this material.

**General:**

Chemical control of mosses is temporary at best and reinfestation will occur unless adverse conditions are corrected.

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