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THE CONTROL OF BERMUDA GRASS

Bermuda grass is a desirable plant in many locations, but it has spread to such an extent that it is a serious pest to many gardeners and farmers.

The plant is spread by seed and portions of surface and underground stems. Haphazard hoeing and cultivation may be a means of spreading it rather than controlling this grass.

CONTROLS

Hoeing and Cultivation. Hand hoeing, roguing, and power cultivation are only satisfactory when practiced diligently for several years. This is especially true if the grass has been permitted to produce seed.

Smothering. Small patches may be smothered out by covering with old pieces of tar paper, tin, linoleum, heavy cartons, etc. These should extend three feet or so beyond the edge of the area to be killed to prevent the grass from growing out from under it. Usually covering for one growing season will eliminate this grass if no seed is in the soil.

Cultural Control. The most economical and one of the most effective ways of controlling Bermuda grass is by smothering with cover crops where this can be done. Use a thickly-sown, dense shade crop, such as, small grain or vetch or Austrian winter peas, seeded at one and one-half or two times the normal rate. Fertilize the smother crop. As soon as this crop is removed, replant with soybeans and fertilize them to promote a heavy growth.

This method will stamp out Bermuda in one season fairly well where the grass has not produced seed, and it is quite satisfactory in cases where two growths of smother crops are used as directed above. Keep the ground covered with a dense cover crop at all times.

Chemical. TCA (trichloroacetic acid) is sold as the sodium, ammonium and calcium salts of this acid and may be used at the rate of 60 to 100 pounds acid equivalent per acre. The lighter rates should be used on lighter soils. Treatments work best when applied between June and October. This chemical is not inflammable. The soil is rendered non-productive for from 2 to 4 months at the above rates, depending on the amount used and the rainfall.

Sodium Chlorate, sold as pure sodium chlorate or as "Atlacide," may be applied at the rate of 1 to 1½ pounds of pure chemical per 100 square feet (450 to 675 pounds per acre). The chemical may be applied as the dry crystals or as a spray. After this treatment, a light sandy soil is non-productive for 6 to 12 months and heavy clay soils are non-productive for 10 to 18 months. The length of this non-productivity depends upon soil type, rainfall, and fertilization. The chemical presents a potential fire hazard when mixed with straw, wood, leather or other organic materials. The danger still exists when the chemical is sprayed and allowed to dry on foliage. Chlorates are slightly corrosive to spray equipment. Large gallonages of water and immediate cleaning of equipment is suggested. Keep farm animals off of sprayed areas.

NOTE

1. If any of these practices are selected, an attempt should be made to follow instructions to the letter. Repeated treatment, especially spot treatment, is often necessary for eradication.
2. The method of shading should be thoroughly considered since this allows for economical land use at the time of treatment.
3. The use of either chemical is expensive, especially on large areas.

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John M. Amos
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