

Lawn Care

PUBLISHED FIVE TIMES YEARLY FOR LAWNTHUSIASTS

PAY DIRT

DURING the gold rush days the term "pay dirt" applied to soil containing enough of that shiny stuff to make it worth the screening.

There was a gamble in dirt in those days. There's a gamble in it now for the home owner who wants to fix up his lawn. He finds himself confronted with the misrepresentations of itinerant peddlers who drive up with a load of "rich black dirt, pure humus." Talk of high fertilizing value and weed killing action paints such a pretty picture that resistance is difficult, especially when it's right there on the scene.

Unfortunately the victims of these soil sharpsters are legion. In St. Louis the complaints came in so regularly that the Better Business Bureau sent this warning to its members:

"This is the season of the year when unknown itinerant humus or fertilizer vendors circulate in the outlying areas,

offering their stuff to gullible home owners at fancy prices. They usually operate from trucks loaded with a large quantity of dark colored substance variously described as fertilizer, humus, blood and humus, etc.

"The usual procedure is to drive around in residential areas watching for men who are working on their lawns. Saturday and Sunday are good days for this scheme. When they see a man working on his lawn, they stop and engage him in conversation, pointing out the bare spots in his lawn indicate there is a need for the type of fertilizer or humus on their truck. After a certain amount of negotiation, it is agreed that they will spread a layer of the so-called fertilizer on the lawn at so much per bushel.

"The trick is the price made per bushel, because the average person does not realize the number of bushels it



will take. One of the important phases of the scheme is the fact that one of the men on the truck persuades the owner to leave the front lawn on some pretext, so that he is in no position to count the actual number of bushels used on the lawn."

The boys make quite a flourish and haste with their application. It's not all for effect either as they dare not stay in one neighborhood for long. As they finish up, the front man writes out a bill, usually in odd cents, having not the slightest connection with the amount used but what he thinks the traffic will bear. His victim is usually astounded at the \$69.78 or \$98.63 and if he argues long enough gets off for half—but the racketeer does handsomely. The black stuff is usually swamp humus or muck or maybe even raw peat that costs him a few dollars for a full truckload.

A variation reported from Buffalo was the sale of "blood and humus." The former from a previous victim, no doubt. For something over two hundred dollars, one gullible customer received ten dollars' worth of fertility and some hundred million unwanted weeds besides.

One resident of a small city in Illinois sent us a sample of some of his purchase for analysis. The price quoted

SIRS:

I am sending a tip which I learned from practical experience of a way to maintain a beautiful lawn at no cost (or in other words, how the lawn can be made to pay for its own keep.)

Feed your lawn plentifully with Scotts Turf Builder to promote a luxurious growth, cut it regularly but save the cuttings and spread them around the rows of garden vegetables. This method will increase the yield of many kinds of vegetables so that the value of said increase will be more than the cost of the Turf Builder used.

VERNON KEENAN,

Beaver, Penna.

seemed reasonable and the owner agreed to pay three cents per pound. This sounds cheap enough except that the material figured about 75 percent water, so he paid at the rate of 22½ cents per gallon for water. His local water company would give him at least 2,000 gallons for a quarter.

Worse than that, the owner guessed the job would run him \$30.00 or \$40.00 so he groped for a chair when presented with a bill for 575 bushels totalling \$862.50.

It isn't only city folks who get taken in. A neighbor in our community paid \$174 for a couple tons that proved to be over 60 percent water. On his own farm he had rotted manure which was worth vastly more.

Another case—this time a defenseless widow. She was even promised an all time weed eradication from the



application of this wonder dirt, but the first rain washed all the fluffy muck into the gutter along with her investment of many needed dollars.

Remember Herba Mira?

Readers of earlier issues of LAWN CARE will recall the self-styled doctor

who peddled his Tasmanian Herba Mira which would grow to only two inches, then stop—no mowing, no watering. He rode around in great style with two liveried attendants but the seed he peddled was really common hay grass, then worth 6 cents a pound. His selling-price was \$2.25.

Hundreds who should have known better—estate owners, golf people, professional and business men—fell for the eloquent salesmanship only to find they were the victims of a hoax. Leavenworth eventually opened its doors to him, but today some of the “black dirt” salesmen make him look like a piker.

What About Humus?

Black dirt isn't always a poor buy. Darker soils are usually considered more fertile because decaying organic matter, called humus, usually imparts a dark color. The trouble is that most muck and swamp land is dark because the organic matter has completely decomposed and only carbon remains.

Most lawn soils are deficient in humus because they were originally built on fill from cellar excavations. This is unfortunate because it is the decaying organic matter that holds together a sandy soil or makes a heavy soil more friable. It acts as a reservoir for moisture and mineral food elements applied in fertilizers. It is what improves the physical condition of a soil, its tilth, friability.

Near many large cities are swamp or prairie areas having what looks like good black dirt to a depth of many feet. It may look “rich” but it isn't much good for top dressing lawns, because the physical structure is not right. It is not “Pay Dirt.”

As a general rule, raw organic matter should not be applied to the surface. It is only valuable as it becomes a part of the soil and this cannot take

place except as it is actually washed into the soil. If a surface dressing is desired, a good topsoil is the material to use. This is not brought around by peddlers but is obtained from reliable people who operate from established places of business and whose standing in the community can be verified.

Worthwhile humus materials include weathered or cultivated peat moss, spent mushroom soil, rotted animal manures. In some localities sewage sludge is available, also decaying leaf mold, well rotted sawdust or other by-products. The important thing is to deal with a known local source of supply such as good landscape contractors, nurserymen or operators of greenhouses.

SIRS:

Our lawn has always been more or less a poor one, but the suggestions that we received from you made us realize that our lawn from now on can be much more of a pleasure. It is our intention to feed and care for our lawn in the Scott manner. This is a great simplification over our past procedure wherein a beautiful lawn resulted but twice a year; it would get terribly scorched and burned, and the waiting while it would again gain its health was always embarrassing.

L. C. S.

Cleveland, Ohio.

SIRS:

Here is a sure way to kill the international lawn pest, Crabgrass. Especially recommended for small spots in the back yard.

1. Get youngsters, ages 3 to 6, preferably your own.
2. Buy play equipment such as swing, slide or sandbox.
3. Place equipment squarely over Crabgrass areas.

My neighbor is getting fair results with a tethered terrier pup. I also did well with chickens. A tent will work, too.

FRANK S. ENDICOTT.

Evanston, Ill.



Are you receiving duplicate copies of Lawn Care? If so, won't you please tell us so we can correct our lists? Do we have your name and address spelled correctly? If possible return the Lawn Care envelope.

The Power of a Woman

One "black dirt" experience with a reasonably happy ending has been reported by a woman reader from Buffalo, Mrs. R. V. Carr of the Wanakah District, Buffalo. She was kind enough to send this amusing and instructive account of it as taken from her family album diary:

Now that the case is settled, I still gasp for breath and break out in a cold sweat at the thought of that fertilizer. Tuesday a shiny new red truck stopped in front and a brawny young man strode up the walk to tell me about the fertilizer he was selling. It was moist black stuff—"blood humus," he called it—and sold for 3c a pound. We've been wanting something like that for several years and men have been so hard to find for that sort of work. Here was a truck and four husky men, so I told him to put some on the oval plot in front of the house.

The boss kept his men humping and, after he was well started, he asked me to get him two iron rakes to work the stuff in. We had only one, back in the garage, and I spent some little time locating one in the garage next door. [A dodge so she would not be around to count the baskets.]

In less than an hour, they called it done and said I could figure it up—they had spread 143 baskets and there were 50 pounds in each basket at 3c a pound. I got a pencil and pad—50×3 made \$1.50. That × 140, to make it easier, so he said, made \$210.00. I walked out to the boss, fairly staggering with horror. He shrugged his shoulders at my protests. I offered him \$50.00 and he laughed at me—there were four men that had to be paid and he expected payment in full. Finally I made out a check for \$100.00. He said I could pay the remainder after Labor Day.

When my husband came home I told him what had happened. He and a gardener friend examined the "blood humus" and found it to be swamp muck probably worth a few dollars a truckload.

The next morning, after finding out that the check had been cashed, we got in touch with the Better Business Bureau. They located all four of the men. Meanwhile, the sheriff's office was informed that others had been swindled.

Bright and early Thursday morning they called me to swear out a warrant. We labored diligently over the proper wording of the petit larceny charge we were making.

Before we got down to business in court on Friday, another sucker from West Lane came in because he had seen the write-up in the suburban edition the night before. The culprit pleaded guilty and offered to refund the money we demanded. The judge fined him \$25.00 for the bother he had caused the authorities and he warned him he would send him to the penitentiary if he ever operated again in our town.

I was hanging up a belated washing after lunch when a car drove into the driveway. The two men from the sheriff's office got out and one of them called: "Hey, Lady, want to buy some fertilizer?" I declined with thanks as they returned my \$100.00.

I had bought that fertilizer on Tuesday morning and by Friday afternoon I had my money back. That was, indeed, swift justice! [Few are that lucky.]

With all that publicity, it would seem Buffalo folk had been adequately warned. But no, a year later the Buffalo Evening News carried an account of two men arrested on a similar charge with North Buffalo residents as complainants.

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