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Question 1: How do I kill the moss growing in grass?

Question 2: How do I kill the grass growing in moss?

Answer: These two contrasting questions came to me in the same week and they brought two idioms to mind. One, the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Two, a rolling stone gathers no moss. I am not sure how the second one applies but it was the only saying related to moss that I know.

Both questions can be addressed by understanding what the requirements for growth are for both types of plants. For moss, the conditions for best growth will include most or all of the following: poorly drained soil, persistently wet soils, medium to dense shade, repeatedly scalped turf, compacted soils, low fertility soils and/or very acid soils.

Relative to the first question, if you want to favor grass over moss you should seek to correct any or all of these conditions that may exist in your yard. All of the conditions described above are not necessary for moss to grow because there are numerous species of moss with slightly different requirements. If you want to grow grass rather than moss you should determine which of these factors exist and work on changing them. A good starting point is to have your soil tested and correct the nutrient and pH problems. Once the soil pH and nutrient conditions are addressed you would move onto to the next most likely factor. For instance, you may have heavy shade from trees. In this case removing trees may fix the shade problem but may not be what you want for your landscape. It may be possible to thin trees or to remove lower limbs to allow more light rather than removing entire trees. Topping trees is not a good way to increase light because the regrowth is often very thick in addition to being weak wood (but that's another article for later).

Don't waste your time trying to kill the moss. Remember if the problems limiting the grass growth are not addressed, the moss will grow back. The moss is not killing the turf as commonly assumed but is simply filling a niche in the environment where the grass grows poorly.

If all this sounds like too much trouble you may want to read further. Remember the second question was: "how do I kill the grass growing in my moss"?

If moss is growing naturally in some areas but not in others it is due to the same factors mentioned above. There are a couple of things you can do in the short run and others that would need lots of time to have an effect. In the short term you can scalp the area frequently to stress the grass and you could stop fertilizing and lower the soil pH with sulfur as directed by a soil test. The use of non-selective herbicides or herbicides that target only grasses may be used over the top of moss. Mosses are rarely damaged by these herbicides. As mentioned, mosses generally grow best in deep shade therefore you can plant more trees for a long term approach to favoring moss over grass. Lastly, do not

plant moss on a rolling stone as it will not gather there but a stone at rest makes an excellent moss habitat.

For further information go to this web link: www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/turf/430-536/430-536.pdf at Virginia Tech or check out the book Moss Gardening, by George Schenk.