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## When to use Dormant Spray, and Lawn Care a Little More Naturally!

*by Art Drysdale*

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Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at http://www.artdrysdale.com

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*Spring is here, at least if you're in lower mainland or on the island in British Columbia. These shots are typical Vancouver street scenes right at the beginning of this month. The cherries and camellias are most impressive. The bicycle basket of blooms is on Bowen Island. Author photos.*

"Apply dormant spray as early as possible, as long as the temperature is above freezing and there is no actual growth of leaf buds"; along with "Don't use dormant spray on evergreens, only on deciduous trees and shrubs." It's unfortunate that these two pieces of advice keep getting repeated. They are WRONG!
The revised recommendations for application of dormant spray are to hold off until there are at least a couple of millimetres (1/4") of new green (or red) growth in the shrubs' or trees' buds, and then put it on when, hopefully there is no rain in the forecast for several days, there is little wind, and the temperature is above freezing. The ideal application conditions don't last for long.

As regards "evergreens on which it should not be applied", the facts are there are plants on which it is not recommended to apply dormant spray, but there are as many deciduous plants as evergreens to which this applies. The list of plants on which to avoid dormant spray is as follows: beech (Fagus), butternut (*Juglans cinerea*), Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), hickory (*Carya*), holly (*Ilex*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*), and walnut (*Juglans nigra* and *J. regia*). And, there's one added important suggestion: that dormant spray not be used on the apple variety 'Delicious' when the night temperatures may fall to near the freezing mark after application. If temps will stay up around 7 or 8 celsius, it's all right, but if colder, the application of dormant oil may cause some cracks in the bark of 'Delicious' apple trees.

In addition, lime sulphur, one ingredient of dormant spray, should not be applied by itself to apricot fruit trees, 'Delicious' apple trees or plum trees, when any of these are in leaf. Other than those exceptions, lime sulphur remains an excellent insecticide/fungicide through most of the summer, but only during periods of moderate heat (never exceeding 27o C). Even the dormant oil that comes in a dormant spray kit may be used during the summer as an insecticide, if it is **thin** oil such as is currently part of the newer dormant spray kits.

Early spring is traditionally the time when home owners, whether they consider themselves to be "gardeners" or not, spend considerable time and money on lawn maintenance, generally including fertilization, possibly weed control, and in some cases, rolling (generally a no-no), aeration, top-dressing and over-seeding. About 17 years ago an old friend, Judd Ringer, wrote a piece that I have "dug out" and will reprint here with few changes. It is very interesting that the recent introduction of the all-natural 'Myke' mycorrhizal fungal products by Premier Technologies and the research behind them, so closely parallels the research carried out by Judd Ringer's company two decades ago.
"Even with the many advances in turf technology, lawns are creating increasing frustrations among many homeowners. Despite following the recommendations for use of fertilizers, water and pesticides, many lawns are still a disappointment. The desired lush grass cover is never quite achieved. Today, professional lawn care operators have emerged and are providing homeowners the important service of fertilizing, and weed/insect control. Even these specialists are confronted with many unsolved turf problems.

"Modern, intensive cultural practices in lawn care, including fertilizing, watering and pesticide use, produce initial gratifying results. However, over a period of time, 5?6 years, it is becoming more evident that these same practices are creating lawn and soil problems.
"In order to better understand the source of some of these problems, it is helpful to take a closer look at the plant/soil relationship.
"Soil is a dynamic, natural environment in which micro-organisms play an important role. Nature has tied up essential nutrients in its organic residues in the form of proteins and carbohydrates. These are the building blocks of all forms of life. Micro-organisms, in consuming these materials, decompose them and recycle the nutrients. They perform important biochemical processes that contribute to soil fertility and plant growth.

"Modern lawn care practices emphasize using soluble fertilizers that are immediately available to plants at the surface of the soil. Roots get lazy and don't have to work in seeking nutrients. They accumulate at the surface. Their channeling, aerating and soil building activities are curtailed. This changing soil environment increases compaction and causes grass plants to make physical adaptations such as shallow roots and thatch formation. Most lawns that have been on intensive chemical fertilizing programs eventually develop a layer of thatch that is a symptom of distress. Thatch consists of both living and dead un-decomposed roots forming a porous layer that dries out rapidly after a rain or sprinkling. Soil underneath the thatch layer tends to compact, reducing moisture penetration. Rapid run-off occurs



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during heavy rains or watering.

"Lawns in this condition must be more frequently watered and fertilized to retain a favorable appearance. Contaminants from intensive fertilizing and watering slowly build up in the soil and form salts creating a hostile environment for micro-organisms and further disrupting the natural system. Decomposition almost comes to a standstill. A lifeless, depleted soil results. Nature's organic cycle has been interrupted. Soil building processes are retarded and nutrients become tied up and less available.

"Thatched lawns are a refuge for insects and pathogenic fungi. Reduced nutrition lowers a plant's immunity to disease. Fungal problems become more common. Unless frequently sprinkled, such lawns dry out rapidly and lose their lush appearance. A "browning out" of the grass will occur.

"Attempts to correct these problems usually have temporary effects. Fertilizing, automatic watering systems, mechanical de-thatching, scarifying, aerating and top dressing come at great expense to the homeowner, but only treat symptoms rather than causes.
"It is estimated that nearly 50% of lawns under intensive chemical fertilizing programmes have thatch. It usually takes 5?6 years to develop, and is a direct result of tampering with natural systems.

"For a number of years, we have studied and experimented with lawns. We have sought and found a superior system of lawn maintenance that will restore a more natural plant/soil relationship. We refer to it as biological fertilizing. This new system has resulted in a product comprised of natural organic ingredients high in protein and carbohydrates and supplemented with a concentration of soil micro-organisms and enzymes.

"Restoration of the lawn and rebuilding of soil is a gradual process taking from one to two years. Thatch will slowly decompose and disappear. The micro-organisms feeding on the organic concentrates gradually release nutrients and produce enzymes that degrade and neutralize contaminants that build up in the soil. As a more normal soil/plant relationship is established, soil loosens and opens up allowing greater root penetration. Biological activity resumes, and the chemical balance is restored. For grass to grow and flourish, its roots must penetrate the soil to seek out and absorb essential nutrients. A dramatic improvement in growth and vigor of the turf results. Improved soil moisture retention reduces the need for sprinkling. Grass will retain a lush, dark green colour and be more immune to insect and fungi problems.

"Newer lawns that haven't had time to develop thatch problems require a lower application rate of biological fertilizing. Spring and fall applications will provide necessary nutrients to sustain a healthy grass cover as well as essential ingredients to assure soil enrichment and formation.

"Although the technology of biological fertilizing is in its infancy and more field-testing is necessary, there is great promise of solving many of the present?day turf problems.

"Biological fertilizers work in harmony with natural systems-accelerating plant growth to meet man's requirements and, at the same time, meeting the demands of the soil and plant."
Moving ahead almost two decades, we have Premier Technologies last year introducing their Myke products, and expanding the line this year to include the Myke Lawn. You'll be reading, hearing and seeing much more about these products this year, and in coming years. I commend them to your attention.

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Art Drysdale was a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada. He is now a temporary resident of Parksville, British Columbia, preparing to build a new home and garden at nearby Nanoose Bay (both on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo). He is heard Saturdays from 8:05 to 10 AM, with a live radio broadcast on Toronto's powerful and clear, AM740 CHWO Primetime Radio.

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