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## ARTICLES

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### The History of Lawns and Lawnmaking (I), what to do with fuchsias, and a Canadian artist in Spain

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>



October 6, 2002



Kay Sanecki, writing in the September 7, 1979 issue of *Gardeners' Chronicle* and *Horticultural Trade Journal* (out of Britain), gave an excellent accounting of the history of lawns and lawn making. I have adapted that piece here.

"Writing in her various editions of *The Ladies Companion to the Flower Garden* in the 1830s, Mrs. Loudon defines a lawn thus: 'Smooth turf, when of any extent in pleasure grounds, is called a lawn; and its chief beau-ties are the uniformity of its surface, and uniformity in the kinds of grasses which cover it, and which produce a uniform tone of green.'

"No one would deny that the description befits requirements for an ideal lawn to-day. But the labour intensive costs of turf maintenance have brought about changing attitudes to lawn care.

"About 1548 the word 'lawn', or laund, came to describe areas of maintained turf. Yet it was not until the era of 'Capability' Brown and the 18th century landscape garden that grass came into its own, as an essential part of the garden. The 18th century lawn, which was taken right up to the walls of houses on the larger estates, needed to be mown by scythe for an extensive area before merging into the surrounding countryside. By dint of its regenerative nature grass became cultivated in this way.

"Reasonably heavy rollers (such as the 'divided garden roller' of early in the 19th century illustrated here) were used on lawns in the 18th century, both to disperse worm casts and to consolidate the turf to render it more even, the day before scything. Three skilled 'mowers' could scythe an acre in a day and, however practised they were, sears (narrow burned areas where the scythe came too close to the crowns of the grass plants--what we now call scalping) remained in the grass for some time afterwards.

"Maintenance between 'mowing' consisted of sweeping up the trimmings, gathering up the daisy heads with a daisy rake, aerating with a fork or spike, and rolling to maintain a generally even surface. Rollers of all types and sizes, stone, wood and iron were in use even in combination with mechanical lawnmowers and frequently played a double role as watering roller or aerating roller. A century ago a large roller filled with water sprinkled a tract of lawn in its wake. As recently as 1931 the Morris Flooder and Roller was advertised as 4½ cwt (228 kilos) which 'can be increased to 10½ cwt (533 kilos) by addition of six iron bars which fit into racks.'

"Its effectiveness lay in the fact that a hose could be attached to a distributor on the roller itself, to supply 'a gentle flowing surface of water over the entire length' of the roller. It could deliver a maximum of 4,600 litres (1,000 gallons) 'in an even sheet' on a full-size bowling green in an hour, 'without disturbing the surface in any way.' Magically, it could be used also as 'some form of squeegee after rain.'

"Lawn maintenance was born during the 19th century, first following the introduction of the mechanical lawn mower, then by that of hoses which would carry water under pressure. The Gutta Percha Company produced a length of tubing, with a union joint every 92 m (100 yards), the sections rendered mobile by separate carriages. Elaborate terminal jets were devised by the Victorians to form fountains as fantastic as their names--'Prince of Wales Feathers', 'Peacock's Tail', and 'Tricorn'.

"Patented sprinklers and novelty force pumps were imported from the USA, and hydraulic engineers in Great Britain also appear to have carried on a brisk business. By 1880 exaggerated claims and uses abounded. An ex-ample is Heathman's Registered Watering Toad, of copper and virtually a dome with numerous perforations, which was attached to the end of a hose. The claim was that it could not only be placed 'upon a box or inverted flowerpot, to water the lawn,' but could be 'thrust into a bush to wash off all dust and insects' or used as 'a conservatory fountain when inverted and suspended from the roof.'

"Many such devices continued in use until the first world war--some up-dated versions even re-appearing. But, generally oscillating pipes or revolving water jets became the accepted method of watering turf, dependent upon water



*The Victorian divided garden roller, dating back to the 19th century, was well decorated! The garden sprinklers and sprayers are from the collection of Britain's Museum of Garden History located in Lambeth Palace on the south side of the Thames River in London. Author photo.*





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pressure for effectiveness.

"Portable spray lines, usually 2.5 cm (an inch) in diameter, made of steel with a varying arrangement of nozzles were commonplace before the Second World War. Nozzles would be in a straight line, the pipe oscillating, or a multiple nozzle line, where the nozzles themselves formed a spiral around the pipes--the latter was soon thought to give too heavy an application.

"The Arroseeur, a continental pattern which watered in circles, was claimed at the time to aerate the water and warm it a little. To-day the principles remain the same, only the materials are lighter and stronger and the whole apparatus more manageable.

"Mr. Ferabee at Phoenix Works, Stroud, England manufactured the first mechanical lawn mower in 1831, to a design by Edwin Beard Budding. It had a cylindrical blade such as used at Brimstone Mills where the designer was employed in the cloth trade.

"In 1832, Budding sold the license to J.R. and A. Ransome of Ipswich, England whose name has remained synonymous internationally with lawn mowers. The first device depended upon blades mounted on a cylinder and working against a blade, and it was the principle of all development in grass cutting for 100 years."

I'll have the second half of this item on lawns next week.

Don Teeple wrote two weeks ago asking, "Can I keep my Fuchsia (red and purple in a hanging basket) indoors over the winter? If so, is there anything special I need to do? RSVP. Thank you."

The answer to that is simple: Yes! In Toronto we used to keep over a number of fuchsias every winter, including for a number of years, three large old standards. We stored these in a cold room that could have been colder, but we had no choice. It generally ran at just below 10o C (50o F) and I would have preferred it at between 4 - 6o C. While we had a fluorescent fixture on for about 12-14 hours per day, it likely wasn't necessary for the fuchsias. If you can give a small amount of light it will help. The fuchsias stored well, and hardly ever required watering. I would advise cutting the plants back by about one-third when you bring them in, and if they are not already indoors now, they should be. Before you bring them in I suggest spraying with a Doktor Doom insecticide, such as the House & Garden Spray. Be sure to spray both the top and undersides of the leaves, and spray the soil as well. Then bring them in the next day.

Obviously I don't know if you have a cold room available. If you do not, you can try keeping them in your house or apartment, but generally these will be far too warm, and the plants do want a rest period. If you don't have a cold room, see if a friend or neighbour will keep them for you. Plants in a cold room that have been pruned back do not require much if any water--likely watering them slightly every two weeks will be sufficient. If the soil remains moist, there is no need to add more water.

Come late February, as light intensity increases, you can bring them up into the house, preferably to a room that is at least cool at night, and where there is good light.

Finally this week, congratulations to artist Ron Benner of London, Ontario. For the last ten years his work "All That Has Value"--a garden of indigenous North American plants, all of which are labelled, has been a major part of the Harbourfront Artists Gardens at Harbourfront Centre on the south side of Queen's Quay in Toronto. The work is seen by thousands daily. Now Ron will replicate his work at a fall exhibition at the Art Centre of Salamanca, Spain. The exhibit opens there on November 20. According to Ron, the work is meant to make viewers re-examine those things on which society places or misplaces value.

By Art C. Drysdale, 893 Shorewood Drive, Parksville, B.C. V9P 1S6.

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 is renovating an old home and will build a new garden there. 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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1. Lawn Sprinkler System
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