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Alternative Lawn, Deer, Small Trees & a Scarecrow

This may be the place for an 'alternative lawn'; one suggestion for deer and roses; some ideas on small trees for containers; and a harmless solution for animals in the garden.
 by Art Drysdale

by **Art Drysdale**

email: art@artdrysdale.com

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>



May 3, 2009





The first question this week comes from Dorothy Hansen, in the Ottawa area. "I live in zone 5 but my problem is my rambunctious dog rather than the winters here. I'm looking for advice on grass to use for the fenced in portion of my back yard. This area (40 by 50 feet) is a safe place for my dog to play when I'm not outside playing fetch with her. Since it is used a lot, even when I'm outside for short periods, she wears down the grass to a hard dirt surface. Fresh green grass outside the fence is now starting to come up (late April). What kind of grass should I plant? How long does it take before I can allow dogs on it again? How do I go about planting grass on worn down dirt? Any other lawn cover advice for plant hardiness zones 4-5 in Canada?

"Thank you very much for any help you can provide."

An interesting question Dorothy! I had in mind sending you a return e-mail and asking some additional questions, but since I was up to my ears in a project most of the week, I didn't get that done. So here goes with some suggestions.

The main thing I was going to ask you was, "Just how married are you to the idea of having a 'lawn' in this 2,000 sq. ft. area?"

I hope your answer to that is "not very!" If that is the case, I think you should consider a lawn alternative. This concept was pioneered by my late friend Bill Aimers, and one of his largest clients was the National Capital Commission in Ottawa. One specific product he liked is called 'Mini Mow' mixture. He always called it the 'lazy man's lawn' be-cause it did not need regular maintenance. It requires cutting only twice per season to maintain its great performance. The mixture contains White clover (*Trifolium repens*), White yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Perennial alyssum (*Aurinia saxatilis*) and California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*).

For 2000 sq. ft. you would need about 700 grams, and you should contact the supplier (OSC Ontario Seed Company at seeds@oscseeds.com) for a price. Now, one disadvantage virtually all of these low-maintenance lawn alternatives have (and there are ever so many of them, with OSC offering six, plus seven wildflower mixes and another no less than 27 specific-use mixes) is they are slightly slower to establish than grass seed. I suggest asking the experts at OSC which mixture would give you the fastest 'take' and when you could feasibly run your dog on the area.

As to what preparation would be needed, another one of the rules to establishing a good alternative lawn is good preparation. That means cultivation, and the removal of the perennial weeds. Again the experts at OSC will no doubt have some advice on this as well.

One other mixture that you could consider is the OSC Xeriscaping mixture which has 25% Yarrow and 75% White clover, and for that I believe you would need about 500 grams. You can see photos of many of these mixes on the company's Website (www.oscseeds.com).

Steve Pickford from nearby Courtenay, B.C. asked a very common question, "I have deer eating my newly planted roses. They are just starting to leaf out. Would it be safe for the leaves to be sprayed with Skoot (already have today, hope I didn't make a big mistake)."

The roses will not likely be permanently harmed by the Skoot, but I also think it may not do much to keep the deer away. Deer seem to consider roses, thorns (soft) and all, as candy! I think I would try Plantskydd (www.plantskydd.com) considered one of the best of the commercial preparations. You can likely obtain it at Art Knapp Plantland in Courtenay (if you encounter Jeremy Green there, give him my regards--I bought his house here in

Above, Dorothy Hansen's photo of her "Dog lawn", and two shots of a wildflower mix growing in the City of Nanaimo's Spirit Park last summer. Below, a Pentas standard growing in a pot outside my office door also last summer, and a Weeping Peashrub that will last for years over winter in a container. Author photos. At bottom, some shots of the Contech Scarecrow at work.




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Parksville)!

There are also several "home-made" remedies which seem to work, and if you cannot find out about one, drop me another note and I shall send one.

Noel Brechin wrote to Donna, also this week, with this question: "We live in Vancouver BC and have a south facing patio [full sun] with a concrete planter that is 24" wide by 16" deep. We want to put a small colourful small tree in. Can you suggest anything?"

That decision is very personal. The first question you need to ask yourself is do you wish a permanent small tree, or would you prefer something that is perhaps more floriferous over the entire season but not hardy over the winter. In the first category are such as: Peegee Hydrangea, Dwarf Korean Lilac (and other similar types), Walker's Weeping Peashrub, Rose-of-Sharon and Fragrant Snowball. In the second category are such 'standards' as Pentas, Popcorn Cassia or Flowering maple. Visit a good garden centre later this month and see what is available, and what you like best.

The fourth query this week comes from the USA, specifically Huntington Beach, California. "I have for the first time grown broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts. I have been harvesting delicious broccoli and cauliflower for a few weeks now. I had harvested the heads of the broccoli and slowly the florets. I went out to harvest some more yesterday to find half of my cauliflower had been munched on and all the broccoli florets are completely gone. I have a problem with what I thought was just rats eating my tomatoes every summer. These bites from the broccoli and cauliflower seem to be maybe possums, I do see a racoon once in a while in the front of the house. Do possums eat veggie's? Do you have any suggestions, I do not want my Brussels sprouts to disappear also."

That's a difficult-to-answer question from so far. Why don't you try a unique product called the Contech Scarecrow motion-activated sprinkler, made here on Vancouver Island. It seems to work well for deer and raccoons, and may work for possums. Check them out on the Web (www.contech-inc.com/Products/Scarecrow) for full information and do let us know how you make out.

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2. CHEMICAL-FREE LAWN The Newest Varieties and Techniques to Grow Lush Hardy Grass by Warren Schultz
3. Storey's Gdnng Skills Illustrated SECRETS TO GREAT SOIL: ...Composting Mulching & Creating Healthy Fertile Soil for Your Garden & Lawn by Elizabeth P. Stell
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