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A Household Word: The Grass Is Always Greener

My dirt was malnourished, vitamin deprived and sickly. Who knew lawns need to eat? I felt like a bad parent.

By Carol Band

Alexander

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Like many urban hipsters, when we had our first baby, my husband and I decided that our child needed certain things that city life simply couldn't provide - things like a school system that would foster his obvious giftedness and a yard where he could safely frolic and sample fistfuls of dirt. So we moved out of our one-bedroom apartment and into a four-bedroom Victorian with a tiny yard, in a town that we hoped would combine easy access to the city with all the advantages of suburban life.

Turns out that suburban life, even in neighborhoods with tiny yards, involves lawn care. It also turns out that while I have absolutely no interest or experience in this area, my husband Harris has even less. Consequently, the "lawn" has become my turf.

For years, I've rationalized the profusion of weeds by saying that only boring suburbanites agonize over crabgrass; that lush, green lawns aren't politically correct. And, although I knew that Al Gore would approve of my organic weeds, I knew my neighbors did not.



A Household Word
BY CAROL BAND

Oh, they didn't come right out and say "Your lawn sucks"; they disguised their disgust by offering up neighborly advice.

"Crabgrass means you're not watering enough," said the woman whose velvety back yard abuts mine.

"At least it's green," I'd reply.

"My brother-in-law has a landscaping business," the neighbor across the street hinted. "Here's his card."

Frankly, the pressure was getting to me. So, last Saturday, I ripped up what I once considered to be perfectly good crabgrass in the quest for lawn perfection.

What I found was grubs - lots of grubs. In fact, my yard had enough writhing larvae to keep Fear Factor on the air indefinitely. Why does my soil look like it was smote by a Biblical plague, while my neighbors' lawns are green and pest-free? According to the guy at the hardware store, the answer is chemicals. Of course, when my kids were little and regularly ingesting significant amounts of yard, using any type of pesticide would have been out of the question. But, now that they are older and stay indoors, safely basking in the glow of the Xbox 360, perhaps a little diazinon wouldn't hurt. At the hardware store I bought Grub-B-Gone, which promised to not only eliminate grubs, but also to kill waterfowl, cause permanent blindness and etch concrete. I can't speak for the grubs, but I was terrified.

Fortunately, before dead ducks dropped from the sky, my next door neighbor intervened.

"Have you tested your soil? You might just need nitrogen or phosphate or potash," she said as she scooped up some of my grubby dirt and sealed it in a Zip-Loc™ bag and headed back to her house. "I'll get back to you in a few minutes."

Frankly, I was calmer waiting for the results of my EPT. A few minutes later, she was back, triumphantly waving a vile of light blue water.

"Guess what?" she beamed.

"It's a boy?" I ventured.


"No," she said, "you need nitrogen."


Indeed, according to the color chart on the home soil test kit, my dirt was malnourished, vitamin deprived and sickly. Who knew lawns need to eat? I felt like a bad parent.

She brought over a bag of organic fertilizer with nitrogen and sprinkled it around my yard like the Lawn Fairy. Together we tossed on the grass seed and watered it with the hose. Then we sat down on the porch and had a beer while we waited for the grass to sprout. Sure, it takes a village to raise a child, but it takes a neighborhood to grow a lawn.

Carol thinks that there might be a market for a Chia lawn. Write to her at

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