



— Soil Fertility Note 2 — Moss

October 1996

NCDA&CS Agronomic Division

Web site: www.ncagr.gov/agronomi

Phone: 919-733-2655

Serving North Carolina growers since 1940

If you are plagued with excessive amounts of moss growing in your landscape, it is likely a sign that you have environmental conditions that are out of balance. Factors such as excess shade, low nutrient levels, wet soil conditions, low soil pH and poor drainage can contribute to the growth of moss. A single factor or a combination of several factors can be the involved. The factor that promotes moss must be changed in order for the problem to be solved.

There are commercial products available that specifically will kill moss. Other choices would include copper or ferrous chloride applied at a rate of 4 oz/1000 ft² in a spray will kill existing moss.

Unless grass gets at least four hours of sunlight, it is not likely to survive. Complete removal of some trees may be necessary, or removal of lower limbs may allow sufficient sunlight into the area.

Improving soil fertility may also encourage growth of desired plants and discourage growth of moss. Submit a problem soil sample to the NCDA&CS Agronomic Division and apply the rates of lime and fertilizer recommended on the soil test report. Most lawn grasses and landscape plants do well at a soil pH of 6.0. Centipedegrass, azaleas and rhododendrons, however, grow best when the soil pH is no higher than 5.5.

Drainage improvements may need to be made to remove standing water and speed up the rate that the soil dries out. Improving air circulation in the area will also help dry out the soil.

If the desired changes are not possible, it may be wise to consider converting the area to a natural area and using a mulch to cover the soil surface. There are also various ground covers that will grow in the shade that may be planted as a lawn substitute.

In summary, the only way to eliminate a moss problem is to eliminate the conditions that favor the growth of moss. Submit soil samples every two to three years to evaluate the soil pH and fertility levels. Decide if the location is suitable to grow the plants you want and evaluate what alternatives are available.

J. Kent Messick
NCDA&CS Agronomic Division

Questions or comments should be directed to the Soil Testing Section of the NCDA&CS Agronomic Division. Additional information on soil testing, nematode testing and plant/waste/solution analysis is available from the NCDA&CS Agronomic Division.