

Today let's talk about mosses. Probably everyone reading this column is very familiar with moss. After all, we live here where it is rainy and shady a good portion of each year. It's the ideal climate for moss to grow – on roofs, in gardens, in grass, on trees and plants, on people (oops just kidding). Some people even collect moss. What!? Yes, it's true, I found a web site for moss collectors. But how can we control moss in our gardens if we don't want to collect it? Read on.

Mosses have existed for literally millions of years on earth. So I think we must accept the fact that mosses will be here long after we're all gone. The trick is to live peaceably with them and maybe even appreciate them. Mosses have two stages in their simple lives – reproductive (making spores) and adult (photosynthesizing food from sunlight). The only problem mosses face (other than humans of course) is drying out too fast. That is the problem we want to capitalize on to discourage them from growing in unwanted places in our garden.

If you have moss in your lawn no matter what the fertilizer or moss killing companies tell you, you will almost always have moss in your lawn. Carefully examine the mossy areas of your lawn. Is that area mostly in shade? If so you might want to seriously consider NOT having a lawn there. Rake the area up, berm it up with more soil and plant shade loving plants. Or if the moss looks healthier than the lawn, let the moss take over and have a moss garden. Plunk in a few ferns and you're done. If the moss is happily taking over at least you won't have to worry very much about weeds. Most weeds that would grow in those mossy conditions look like they were meant to be there anyway.

If you absolutely have to have a lawn in a specific area your real choice is to get sunlight in as well as you can. That will require removing whatever is blocking the sun from that area. Then you'll want to be sure you have at least eight to twelve inches of well draining soil and good drainage in that area. Plant it with a grass seed mix that will survive during moist, rainy, low light days for much of the year. Fescue is usually the grass for this condition. Be sure to read any labels on packages of seed extremely carefully. Mixtures of Kentucky bluegrass and most rye grass won't survive shade or too much moisture. If you're purchasing turf be sure to question, question, question. Don't pay out your hard earned money if the seed package or the turf company can't deliver a grass that will live in the conditions where you want it to grow.

Another solution to mossy problems is to dig, rake and till up the area (you'll be making your own nitrogen rich composted soil) and try to expose the area as much as possible to sunlight. This works especially well in parts of the garden where moss lightly coats the top of the soil and is very patchy. Moss can also indicate that the soil needs to be aerated by digging and tilling. Try covering the area with two to three inches of compost, mulch or beauty bark. This layer of compost or mulch will help prevent moss spores from receiving light and the moss will become part of the compost to nourish the soil. The moss is an indicator of what plant to grow here though. You'll want plants that like shade (or low light) and some moisture.

Let's briefly go from shade to sun. Roses love sun. It's time to think about planting bareroot roses. Every year Valley Nursery puts out a great brochure listing the roses available for the current year. This year's 2001 Rose List is called "The Romance of Roses." Valley offers: hybrid teas, grandifloras, floribundas, climbers, rugosa roses, polyanthas, miniature roses, English-style roses, old garden roses, shrub roses and groundcover roses. You can pre-order or take your chances on a first come first served basis. Prices range from \$8.99 through \$12.99 per plant. I ordered two Cecile Brunner climbers to festoon our newly sun-drenched fence. Call Valley at 360-779-3806. Or stop in, they're on Bond Road in Poulsbo.

To find out more about growing roses attend a meeting of the Kitsap County Rose Society. The Society meets the third Monday of each month (except November and December) at 7 p.m. at the Clearcreek Retirement Center on Silverdale Way. Contact President Eric Hunter at 337-9917 for more details.

You can email comments to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.