

The Augusta Chronicle

LIFESTYLE

Campbell Vaughn: Whether you want moss, or not, here are some tips to help it thrive or die

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Published 4:01 a.m. ET Nov. 10, 2023 | Updated 4:02 a.m. ET Nov. 10, 2023

Most of the time, you can't have it both ways. There is something about getting to eat the cake and keeping it at the same time.

One of the questions I hear often is about moss. Some folks don't want moss and others do want moss. Usually when you don't want moss, it is in the grass or growing on some hardscape. When you do want moss, it is usually where you don't want grass and you do want it on hardscape.

This week my friend Judge O asked about getting rid of it in his grass. So I tried to share with him some about what I know about moss.

There are thousands of species of moss worldwide. Mosses are simple plants that lack the typical leaf, shoot, root, and seed-forming systems of higher evolved plants. But they are also some of the hardiest living organisms on the planet.

The moss we mostly see is lawn moss. This type of moss can reproduce sexually (spores) or asexually (breaking off into smaller pieces that divide and multiply). Their numbers can increase rapidly under the right conditions.

The first thing I tell folks that ask about moss is understanding the conditions that this simple plant needs to thrive. The four things lawn moss needs to grow are acidic soil, compacted soil, moisture and shade. The interesting thing about moss thriving is it can be just one of these conditions or any combination of the four conditions that are favorable to its growth.

To get rid of moss, eliminate these conditions.

Do a soil test to check the pH. If the pH is too low (acidic), then add lime. If the area has compacted soil, then either core aerate or lightly till.

Moisture can be a tricky issue, but it can be handled. Roof gutters that dump water into a specific area can saturate the soil as well as condensation drains from HVAC units. Try and have these drains piped to somewhere it doesn't sit and soak a specific area. Turn off irrigation heads that may be hitting this moist area of low light and compacted soils.

If you can open the mossy ground to more sunlight you can kill two birds with one stone. Sunlight can dry up the moist areas and increase the UV rays that keeps moss suppressed. Do not spray moss and algae removers that you can buy at a local hardware store on grassy or shrubby areas.

Campbell Vaughn: When is the best time to prune your plants? Find out here.

If you do want moss, forget everything I just wrote in the previously. Rarely do you get moss to grow when you want it. Definitely don't lime the area. Use a tamp to compact the soil. Plant a shade tree. Find someone that has moss and dig some up with a flat head shovel and transplant it in small pieces.

Newly transplanted moss needs to stay moist. You don't necessarily have to soak the area, but definitely keep it moist. A little patch here and there should spread and make a nice large patch eventually. After the moss is established, eliminate encroaching grass by spraying a very light solution of glyphosate or a product like Grass B Gon. The less competition, the better the moss will look.

Even if you don't care if moss is in your grass or garden, it is a good indicator of the conditions that may not be favorable to growing certain plants. So if your long term plan is to enhance your landscape with new planting, start changing the conditions so the moss will leave and your plants can thrive.

