

Lawns and Lawn Care: How can I get rid of the moss in my lawn?

In western Oregon lawns, with our many shade-producing trees and mild, wet winters—moss happens. In fact, moss thrives in the very conditions that grass dislikes: shade, poor drainage, compacted soil, and high acidity. Many owners with moss in their lawns may be tempted to simply buy a moss-killing product, apply it to their lawns, and assume that will get rid of the moss. But if you don't deal with what's *causing* the moss to grow in the first place, the moss will simply continue to come back year after year after year...

Instead of fighting it, some people simply choose to embrace their moss-covered areas. According to Metro regarding having moss in lawns, "*The simplest solution is to appreciate the moss as a lovely, trouble-free green ground cover that is soft underfoot.*" So if you're thinking that it's possible moss isn't so bad after all, [check out this info on encouraging mosses](#).

However, if you'd still prefer to have a lush, *moss-free* lawn, consider these possible factors and tackle all the ones that could be encouraging that moss to grow in your yard:

Factors that contribute to moss growth:

- **Too much shade**

Grass prefers sunlight to grow well. In many yards, overgrown trees and shrubs block most of the sunlight that used to fall on the lawn area. Try pruning and thinning the trees and shrubs that are shading your mossy areas to get more sunlight onto your grass.

- **Too wet or too dry**

Too much water creates a consistently moist environment that mosses love, but grasses dislike. Too little water can cause grasses to thin and die out in the summer, creating open areas that mosses fill in during the wetter winter months. Check your sprinkler system and adjust the amount of water the mossy areas are getting in your lawn.

- **Compacted soil**

Grass roots need oxygen but can't get it as easily when the soil is compacted. A manual sod-coring tool or a power-driven core aerator can help aerate your soil. However, be careful not to injure surface or shallow tree roots when using these tools.

- **Poor drainage**

You may need to change the contour of your moss-filled area so there are no low spots where the water pools and doesn't drain well. Incorporating several inches of organic matter into the soil will also help improve the texture and drainage, as well as aerating the area.

- **Poor soil—depleted, acidic, diseased**

If your moss is outperforming your grass, it could mean that your grass hasn't been properly fertilized, that the soil is too acidic (it should have a pH between 5.5 and 6), or the grass could have diseases or even insect damage. Closely examine and test your lawn and take any necessary steps (such as adding fertilizer) to improve the situation.

- **Heavy thatch**

Removing excess thatch (dead organic matter) from your lawn will increase how vigorous your grass is, will decrease the water retention on the surface, and will help the water reach down to the roots of the grass. Dethatching should be done in the spring. Thatch can be removed by using a dethatching rake or a vertical mower/power rake or power dethatcher.

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Killing moss—mechanically or chemically

Moss, like thatch, can also be removed mechanically with a dethatching rake or a power dethatcher and should be done in the spring. If you decide to apply chemicals to kill your moss, know that all herbicides are not created equal.

- **Iron compounds**, especially those that contain complete fertilizers, are great at quickly killing moss while also helping to “green up” your turf. However, iron can stain concrete and other surfaces, so the product must be applied carefully.
- **Cryptocidal soaps** can be used for moss control and will bleach the moss to a whitish yellow instead of the dark brown when iron is used. Soaps are safe to use near sidewalks and other structures.
- **Copper or Zinc** can harm turf grass, *so should not be used in your lawn*. But it can be used on roofs and walkways and will not stain structures.

Be aware that some chemicals used to kill moss can cause severe skin and eye irritation and others are highly toxic to aquatic invertebrates. *Always **read the label and follow the directions carefully** before applying any chemicals to your landscape!*

Replant with shade tolerant grasses

After removing the moss, you should add an organic fertilizer, a topdressing of weed-free compost and an appropriate grass seed. In western Oregon's wet, shady sites, **roughstalk bluegrass** and **bentgrass** do better than other grasses that need full sun.

Replace with shade-loving groundcovers or hardscape!

If you don't want moss in your yard but just can't get your grass to grow, consider getting rid of both and [planting shade-loving groundcovers](#). Many easy-care groundcovers also provide additional color in their flowers for part of the year. But if it's a particularly tough place to get anything to grow, a decorative hardscape of pavers, brick, or other non-living material may just be your best choice...

[Get more information on how to get rid of the moss in your lawn](#)

and [how to manage the moss around your home](#).

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