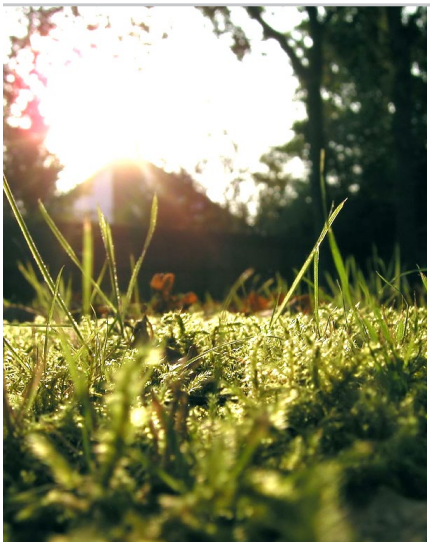
Stop Fighting It

Moss Lawn

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Creating a Moss Lawn

Mosses are common in Metro Vancouver. They grow on rocks, rich organic soils, mineral soils and tree bark. These local, generalist mosses are also adaptable, which makes them good lawn substitutes. Generalist mosses prefer shady, sloping or undulating ground, exposed soils and rocks, and coarse woody debris. Most established mosses also persist under sunny and dry conditions, however, they may show signs of stress.

Other than the weedy, common lawn moss (Rhytidiodelphus squarrosus), the vast majority of mosses do not compete well with lawn grasses. Mosses don't like heavily fertilized and limed soils and cannot compete with healthy grasses. So, you will need to choose, either turf-grass (with or without Rhytidiodelphus) or just moss. That means when preparing for a moss 'lawn', all turf-grasses and broad-leaved weeds need to be completly removed.

Local moss species to use as lawn alternatives

Fan moss
(Rhizomnium glaucescens)



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Small flat moss
(Pseudotaxiphyllum elegans)



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Common hair cap moss
(Polytrichum commune)



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Badge moss
(Plagiomnium insigne)



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Red roof moss
(Ceratodon purpureus)



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Stair-step moss
(Hylocomium splendens)



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Broom moss
(Dicranum scoparium)



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Roadside rock moss
(Racomitrium canescens)



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Preparation

Unfortunately, true mosses are not sold at local nurseries, so moss lawns are ideal for those who already have moss on their property, or who have access to an existing moss garden. Collecting moss for propagation should only be done with permission. As mosses are colonial plants, they multiply vegetatively to form extensive mats. Mosses usually produce spores, which, under the right conditions, germinate to produce new independent moss colonies making mosses easy to transplant. The best time of year to replace your turf lawn is when you can avoid frost and extreme heat, and when you can provide sufficient water while plants are establishing. It is particularly important to establish moss when wind is calm and temperatures are moderate. Clear the area of all other vegetation, vigilantly remove weeds, and rake evenly. Collect intact moss mats pulled up from the ground or moss fragments from a fresh and supple, not dry or brittle source. Single species can be used or multiple species can be mixed together. Mixtures are often the most successful, as one or two species may be more successful than others on certain sites.

Method 1 – The Blender Method

Spin/blend moss fragments in buttermilk, yogurt or beer, then apply the slurry to a surface where moss growth is wanted. The acidity and stickiness of the liquid should help to prepare the ground conditions for good moss growth.






Method 2 – The Traditional Method

Place moss mats or fragments (teased apart with your fingers) on the surface of soil that has been stripped of vegetation. Lay the moss mats or fragments down on the soil surface, then water sparingly, but frequently with a fine mist or spray particularly in dry, warm weather. Check your municipal sprinkling regulations. In the first week, periodically press the moss to the soil surface, to promote the close contact with the soil needed for rapid establishment. This can be done with a turf roller or even with careful walking on top of the moss.






Properly Maintain your Moss Lawn

For a dense moss cover, debris (leaves, conifer needles, cones, etc.) must also be kept off the moss surface. This is usually done by hand picking until the moss is established enough to handle gentle sweeping with a coarse broom. Along with weeding, and watering during dry periods, regular sweeping or blowing are the only requirements for the long term health of a moss lawn.