



Is native the new green?

ABODE'S LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE EXPERT TONY MILNE PONDER'S NEW ZEALANDER'S PREOCCUPATION WITH MAINTAINING GREEN, MANICURED GRASS AND SUGGESTS THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW APPROACH TO THE KIWI LAWN.



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Derek, cajoled by Joy, has one, so does Trevor. Chris, Nigel and the glimpses I get of Cory's confirms he too has one. Much to the chagrin of my family we don't. I deflect blame to our carnivorous family pet Lulu, or more precisely her nitrogen loaded urine. We have suggested she adopts a plant-based diet but we'll probably have better luck encouraging her to drink more water.

However, that may be a little unfair. Lulu, our black Labrador, can only shoulder some of the blame. I am equally responsible. While I make reassuring comments to my family, I cannot match Derek's attendance to broadleaf weed removal and Chris's regular weed and feed routine.

I'm sure Trevor chalks his mowing lines and I'm convinced Nigel has leveraged his contacts to get pedigree seed. The only time I have got close to grass as green as Nigel's was in the lunch break at Hagley Oval. Oh, the wondrous experience of lying on such a manicured carpet of turf, I can only imagine the return you would get from a sweetly-timed cover drive.

And, if Cory's Robinia shaping reflects his attendance to lawn maintenance, then his would be a greenkeeper's dream. I am told some people also trim their edges with scissors. My family is taking some convincing that a mosaic of Onehunga, hawksbeard, clover, dandelion, dock, nettle, rye, and browntop is an acceptable alternative to the well-loved and manicured carpets our neighbours keep.

Let's face it, what is wrong with a little creeping oxalis, wood sorrel or speedwell. I am sure the bees and butterflies think our patch is quite luxurious. Anyway, isn't a weed simply a plant in the wrong place? Visually, a mosaic of interest I suggest and sometimes it is green.

I do like keeping a sward of grass, to call it a lawn would suggest something finer. A line trimmer may suffice, but I do mow it when I can. I enjoy the regularity of the Saturday morning mowing. I was brought up to never mow on a Sunday, Presbyterian roots I'd suggest. Setting three on the Briggs and Stratton Sprint 375 for the verge, four down the side of the path and five for the mosaic patch enclosed by our front fence.

So, you can understand my mortification to arrive home from work one day to find our lawn crisscrossed with intricate mowing lines and patterns. These were unlike my own, very much the work of a lawn mowing franchise. This was a one off, I was told, out of desperation. It followed our neighbourhood petty thief strolling off with our mower. That was the last we saw of it. Although we did receive a letter from the Police letting us know the said thief had, while incarcerated for another offence, confessed to the taking of our mower.

I am comfortable with my predilection for a good lawn, I take my role as President of the Tonbridge Street Lawn Cricket Club very seriously. However, as I continue to mow, sometimes even fertilise, and even at times contemplate scarifying our mosaic of weeds, I do ponder why.

For some time now, we as a practice have been advocating alternatives to rye, browntop, and fescue. Renowned ecologist Colin Meurk has been waging this war for much longer.

Possibly I should relinquish my battle for the greenest lawn and look to native groundcover to provide a mosaic of ecological and aesthetic interest instead.

Perhaps I could even tempt Derek, and the others, to try a little Acaena, Dichondra, Leptinella – filiformis, minor and squalida, Pratia, Selliera, and even, Zoysia?

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