

## Mail Order Lawn Care

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I find strange ways to pass the time. I read the ads in Sunday papers looking for those outrageous claims of the latest amazing fast growing tree, or the instant deep green lawn grass, or the new miracle way to grow tomatoes. I spend time looking for these products in self defense because some one is eventually going to ask about them. Lately, probably because spring is around the corner, I've been seeing advertisements on the internet for essentially mail order lawn care products. "Tell us where you live and we'll develop a lawn care program specifically for your yard and deliver it to your front door with four easy payments." Uh-huh. Sure.

But I couldn't just let it go at that. I wanted to know what I would be getting and how much it was going to cost. So I picked two in a very scientific way. I picked the first two that came up for me. One was a well known company that was offering traditional dry fertilizer products you spread with a fertilizer spreader. The second was a company I had not heard of before that sold you packets of product that you attach to your garden hose and apply with water.

First, the widely recognized company product. They suggested a four step treatment starting with fertilizer and crabgrass preventer fairly soon followed by a late spring fertilizer and broadleaf weed killer. Later in the summer they suggested an insect control application followed by an early fall fertilization. The fertilizer application rates were about one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet which is very consistent with what we recommend for cool season lawns. I'm not a big fan of routine lawn insecticide treatments unless you know you have a problem but I couldn't really fault this program. For a price of around \$24 per bag this program would be delivered to your front door. Other than the convenience of it being delivered to your door, you could go to a local hardware store and buy the same products for about the same price.

The second product, liquid based - attach to your garden hose, was from a company I wasn't familiar with. They asked me to enter my address and they pulled up what looked like a Google Earth photo and asked if it was my house. I said yes and they calculated the square footage of my lawn area. They told me that I was in a warm wet climate with slightly acidic soil. Furthermore they said that my regional soil profile was 59% silt, 28% clay and 13% sand. There is no way that I would call our climate warm and wet. I've soil tested my yard and it is not slightly acidic (which I would expect to be 6.5%). It is alkaline at 8.1 pH. What they described was a silty clay loam and I wish I had a silty clay loam!

The products were all "natural based" including the weed and insect control products. I don't have a lot of faith in those. The fertilizers were appropriately labeled with their nutrient content as required by law. The liquid packets were labeled as being for 5,000 or 3,000 square feet of lawn area. No matter which of their products I looked at it came out to be applying two ounces of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, well under the recommended one pound (16 ounces) of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet rate. These rates are simply not adequate to provide season long healthy growth for most lawns. Here was the real kicker - the proposed program was going to cost \$129 for the season. Please don't waste your money on this product!

You can find and buy almost anything on line now days. Unfortunately, when it comes to lawn care, most of these companies have no idea what it's like to try to grow a lawn in Kansas. Use local sources where you can talk to people who face the same challenges. Ask me for help, ask a local nursery for help, but be very leery of mail order lawn care products!