

Ag Column  
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## Plenty of Clover this Spring

Home lawns and farm pastures are full of clover this spring. With the wet weather in April, clover was likely to be persistent in lawns and pastures. White clover is a shallow-rooted perennial that thrives when soil moisture is plentiful.

Many homeowners consider white clover in their lawn a troublesome weed. They prefer a monoculture of a single species of turf grass with dark green color and soft texture. In the early part of last century, clover was often cultivated as a desirable part of a home lawn.

There are some disadvantages to clover in a home lawn. If you are allergic to bee stings, clover increases your risk of being stung. For some people, clover in the lawn looks unkempt and weedy. According to Kelsey Noll and Steven Daniels, Rutgers University students, clovers are more delicate than lawn grasses. Therefore, they perform best in low to mid-traffic areas.

On the positive side, Noll and Stevens points out that clover offers an inexpensive and sustainable option for a home lawn. According to an article titled, "How Much Nitrogen Will Clover Put in the Soil?" by SFGATE, clover can add up to 100 pounds of nitrogen to the soil if the right bacteria exists in the root system. Newly seeded clover requires inoculation to insure the right bacteria is present. Clover also provides a food source for honeybees, which should encourage healthier bee populations.

Clover absorbs nitrogen from the air, and produces nitrogen in its root system. Because clover produces nitrogen, fertilizers do not have to be applied as often, which saves the homeowner time and money. SFGATE points out that mowing clovers causes some loss of root system, allowing nitrogen to be added to the soil. A balance exists between the leafy growth above ground and the root system. When lawn clippings are left on the lawn, this also adds nutrients back to the turf. Clovers prefer a pH of 6 to 7 and can be found growing in full sun as well as light shade. Clover easily reseeds from the seed that builds up in the soil.

With all of these considerations for clover, you can discourage clover in your lawn if you prefer by fertilizing according to soil test recommendations. Nitrogen fertilization will favor fescue growth and crowd out the clover. Sometimes, an herbicide application will be required to eliminate the clover. Call your local Extension office for more information on soil testing and for chemical recommendations.