

Gardening with Moss by Fran Benton

“Really?” you may say, my lawn is mostly moss so I guess I can say I garden with moss! Actually there are a whole lot of people out there who have given up their grass lawns in favour of moss lawns. So why do lawns get full of moss and how do you get rid of it (if you want to)? Well let’s face it – we live on the wet coast. We get a lot of winter rainfall. Our soils are mostly pozols. These soils types have their nutrients leached out and are often heavy with silt or even clay. You are a lucky person if you have a lawn with a sandy light soil. Grass loves those conditions and moss does not! Moss adores my lawn. Large mature



fir and cedar trees surround us. The soil is acidic and heavy silt. Moss thinks my place is divine! It outgrows the grass with enthusiasm. A great deal less enthusiasm is shown by my husband who tackles the grass vs moss lawn with all manner of horticultural warfare. His weapons of choice are dolomite lime, iron sulphate, and a magnificent

dethatched/demosser attachment for the lawn tractor. He has been known to mix up a beer and soap concoction and spray the lawn with that. Sadly all this seems to be in vain as the moss comes back with enthusiasm. Let’s face it, moss loves these soils and these trees and this wet coast!



A book I have been reading about moss landscapes is by Annie Martin. She has a nursery for moss, a mossery. She sells big trays of all kinds of moss species. These are super popular in Asian style gardens. They are also very popular in terrariums and fairy gardens. I like growing moss for bonsai planters and as a living mulch in

summer planters. They keep the soil moist and cool but do not change the nature of the potting soil. There are many different types of moss. A hike up Cobble Hill Mountain from the Thain Road location will allow you to see lots of moss. Moss can obviously not be harvested from parks but you can take small amounts from roadsides or private properties with permission. If you know an area is going to be developed often you can get permission to remove moss from that area. Once you collect a few handfuls of moss find a shady moist spot to place the moss. Care for the moss by light frequent watering and semi shade. I put them in old cracked plant saucers. They will double in size and do very well. Pull a bit of black deer mesh over the moss to protect them from raccoons and varied Thrushes. These guys toss your moss all over the place looking for bugs and worms that live underneath. If you are cleaning a roof you can save all that handsome red roof moss and plant it around shrubs in shady areas. Moss is fun and a vital part of natural ecosystems. And it helps fight climate change. How good is that? Happy gardening!

