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Lawn Lover's Workshop (summary notes)

As presented by Annette McFarlane

Green/Common Couch (*Cynodon dactylon*)

- Fine texture, hardy, frost tolerant, salt tolerant, copes with heavy traffic, good herbicide tolerance, moderately drought tolerant
- Popular for golf courses, bowling greens, sporting fields, parks and domestic lawns.
- Includes 'Winter Green', 'Legend', 'Santa Ana', 'Greenlees Park', 'CT2', 'Oz Tuff' ('Oz-E-Green'), Tifgreen, Tifdwarf.
- Poor shade tolerance, less green in winter, susceptible to lawn grubs

Queensland Blue Couch (*Digitaria didactyla*)

- Fine texture, green/blue colour maintained during winter, frost tolerant, salt tolerant, copes with heavy traffic, moderately drought tolerant, can be cut short, good winter colour
- Once the preferred grass for Qld, but herbicide sensitivity has lessened its popularity.
- Include 'Queensland Blue', 'Aussie Blue' also known as 'Tropika Blue'
- Poor shade tolerance, poor herbicide tolerance (cannot spray green couch out of blue couch), susceptible to lawn grubs

Broad Leaf Carpet Grass (*Axonopus compressus*)

- Coarse texture, shade tolerant, low maintenance, copes with moderate traffic
- Remains a popular grass in some parts of tropical Australia
- No named varieties
- Drought sensitive and intolerant of salt, some susceptibility to lawn caterpillars

Zoysia (*Zoysia japonica* and *Zoysia matrella*)

- Very fine texture, dense growth, drought tolerant, salt tolerant, moderately shade tolerant, some tolerance to lawn grubs
- Promoted as new, low maintenance grass
- Includes 'Empire', 'Empress' and 'Nara' (native to Australia)
- Prefers slightly acidic soil, best maintained with a cylinder mower, slow to establish, prone to thatch.

Sweet Smother/Durban Grass (*Dactyloctenium australe*)

- Coarse, soft leaf blade, highly shade tolerant, deep green colour in shade
- Once highly popular due to its shade tolerance, but largely overtaken by harder wearing soft leaf buffalo
- Cannot tolerate heavy traffic, needs to be cut slightly higher, requires good drainage, not frost tolerant, susceptible to lawn caterpillars

Kikuyu (*Pennisetum clandestinum*)

- Coarse, vigorous growing, spread by aggressive rhizomes, hard wearing, good salt and heat tolerance
- Remains popular in tropical climates
- Prone to thatch, tends to invade garden beds and is difficult to remove, grows less well in shade.



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Soft Leaf Buffalo (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*)

- Coarse leaf and rhizomes, shade tolerant, frost tolerant, some salt tolerance (less than green couch), less frequent mowing, some tolerance to lawn grubs.
- Popular for domestic use and in shady areas in parks
- Includes 'Sir Walter', 'Palmetto', plus Maltilda (semi-dwarf) and 'Sapphire' (a slightly finer leaf form).
- Must be cut higher than other grasses (prone to being spongy/thatch). Sensitive to Dicamba sprays, but other sprays available. Not drought tolerant.

Oversowing with cool season grasses

Oversowing is the process of sowing seed of a relatively short-lived grass type into an existing perennial lawn to improve its look, colour and wearability during winter.

Common grasses used for oversowing include:

- Ryegrass (annual and perennial)
- Bentgrass
- Fescue

What conditions do grasses prefer?

- Deep, open, uncompacted soil (min 15-20cm)
- Moderately fertility
- Neutral pH (6.7-7 except Zoysia)
- Lots of sunshine (minimum 6 hours full sun)
- Good drainage
- Regular deep watering
- Lack of root competition from other plants
- Good soil biology/organic matter

Lawn maintenance

- Aerate compacted/traffic areas twice each year (garden fork, hand corer or coring machine)
- Remove any thatch build up (vertical cut, thatching machine or low cutting to scalp the lawn) when grass is actively growing in summer, followed by fertiliser and water
- Check pH and adjust as required (typically when aerating)
- Apply a complete balanced, slow release fertiliser in spring, summer and autumn
- Water generously and deeply each week when there is no rain
- Mow regularly with sharp blades (twice each week if necessary) removing 1/3 of the leaf blade at a time, ideally using a cylinder/reel mower
- Where possible, mow without a catcher to return the organic matter to the soil and add extra nitrogen
- Control weeds
- Control pests



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Strategies to control weeds include:

- Mow regularly
- Aerate compacted areas
- Grow a thick sward of grass to resist weed invasion
- Clean mower when moving from one property to another
- Use a daisy weeder/boiling water/organic contact herbicides
- Spot spray using organic or inorganic fertilisers to burn weeds out
- Use selective herbicides according to the rate suggested by the manufacturer

If you choose to spray herbicides you really need to know exactly what you are using. Always look at the small print that tells you the active constituent. **To find out more information on the toxicity of products you may already have in the garden shed, type the name of the chemical into your search engine, followed by MSDS (Material Safety Data Sheet).** You might find hand weeding, use of boiling water, burning weeds out with concentrated fertiliser or organic contact sprays like 'Slasher', suddenly look much more attractive!

What herbicide sprays have you used in the past?

- MCPA/ Dicamba/Mecoprop – Used for broad leaf weeds in couch lawns (soft leaf buffalo has some sensitivity to dicamba))
- Bentazone – Used for Mullumbimby couch and other sedges
- Bromoxynil – bindii, clover, oxalis and other weeds in soft leaf buffalo and other lawns
- DSMA – Controls paspalum, but not suitable for blue couch
- Sempra – Used for nutgrass

Controlling Pests

Lawn grubs is the collective term applied to several different grass pests including:

- Army worm

Organic controls include entomopathogenic nematode (Steinenema carpocapsae), moth zapper/traps, Dipel/BT, spinosad-based products, Eco-Grub and Dr Mac (tea tree), Eco-neem.

- Black beetle

Spinosad-based products, Eco-Grub and Dr Mac (tea tree), Eco-neem.

- Sod web worm

Moth zapper/traps, Dipel/BT, spinosad-based products, Eco-Grub and Dr Mac (tea tree), Eco-neem. If you have used chemicals to control lawn grubs it is likely they contained

Imidocloprid/Confidor (banned in some European countries due to decreasing bee populations), Chloropyrifos (also used on termites).