



David Domoney's



GUIDE TO
THE PERFECT

Lawn



A Lovely Lawn

is a hallmark of British gardens, but it's also much more than that. The lawn is the place the kids and grandkids play. It's often where we lay and bask in the sun. It's also really important for many different types of wildlife, including birds and insects.

No garden would be complete without it, and yet many of us neglect our lawn. It often gets overlooked for the prettiness of the borders and flowering plants, but a well-kept lawn is stunning to behold, and a poor lawn will bring down the look of the whole garden.

Once abandoned, they can become patchy, brown, weed-infested or overgrown, so it is important to keep on top of lawn care even though it might sometimes feel like a chore. As with many gardening jobs, the best cure for lawn problems is prevention, and to prevent problems with your lawn you must keep up with season specific maintenance jobs.

Not only will these jobs care for your lawns needs, they will also keep it looking its best all year round.



Fun Facts About Lawns:

- One very famous lawn, known to most as the Centre Court at Wimbledon, is allegedly the most expensive lawn to maintain in the world, and is made up of perennial ryegrass.
- Lawns are great at producing oxygen, one 7 square metre lawn can produce enough oxygen in a day for the needs of one person.
- The lawnmower was invented by Edwin Beard Budding in Gloucestershire and was patented in the year 1830.
- A 70kg man can burn 167 calories in half an hour of lawn mowing with a powered mower.
- It's estimated that there are 15 million garden lawns in Britain, and we collectively spend a whopping £54 million on lawn fertilisers every year.



So now you know a little more about the noble lawn, I'm going to show you how to create the perfect patch for your own garden, and how to maintain it year-round. Let's get started!

There are loads of varieties of grass out there and lots of mixes that combine several different varieties, so it can be a little overwhelming. To help you choose, here are some of the most common types of grass used for lawns in the UK, what they look like, and what conditions suit them best.

It is worth noting that Fescue and Bent grass varieties are most often used for luxury lawns – so if you just want your lawn to look good, then these are your choice. Ryegrass and Meadow types are known as utility grass types because they are more hardwearing and will stand up to more foot traffic – so will be a much better option if you have kids or pets.

Common Types of Lawn Grass

Utility

Dwarf Ryegrass

Generally produces a thicker lawn. Dark green with a reddish tint at base.

Moist soil and sunny areas. Hard-wearing and quick to establish.

Lesser Timothy

Tufted, light green in colour, thicker at stem.

Very hard-wearing and can withstand cold winters and wet soil.

Smooth-stalked Meadow Grass

Deep green colour, thicker blades, often attracts more wildlife.

Dry yet fertile soil and shady areas. Able to withstand drought, heavy foot traffic, and hot or cold temperatures.

Luxury

Chewings Fescue

Dark green in colour and stiff, bristle-like blades.

Dry, shady environments, cooler areas. Doesn't like hotter climates. Good drought resistance.

Slender Creeping Red Fescue

Glossy medium green blades that are fairly stiff in texture.

Well-drained soil, shaded areas. Establishes quickly so good for a new lawn.

Common Bent

Paler green in colour, can be mowed very short, so often looks uniformly neat.

Dry or difficult/acidic soil. Does well in nutrient poor conditions.

Turf VS. Seed

This is the big question for a new lawn. There are benefits to both methods, depending on the size of your lawn, your budget and other variables.

Sowing seed is cheaper, and once you have prepared your ground, it is a quick and simple process to sow your seeds. This method does require more patience, as it will be roughly six weeks before your grass begins to resemble a fully formed lawn. A couple of issues you can have are wildlife eating the seed and weeds trying to invade before the lawn is fully formed.

Laying turf is more expensive, but much faster, as it looks to be a fully formed lawn as soon as you've laid and watered it. It only takes a week or so for the segments to join together fully and then you can use your lawn as normal. Rolling out turf can also be a more physically demanding job, especially if you have to get your turf over to awkward areas of your garden, as the turf itself is quite heavy.

Once you've chosen whether to use turf or seed, you will need to prepare your ground. This process is the same no matter which method you have chosen.

1. Dig up any old turf and dispose using a green recycling bin or compost heap and then loosen the soil and remove any stones or weeds.
2. Rake the area to create a smooth surface and remove large stones and debris along the way.
3. Tread over the whole area, pressing down and putting applying pressure to the ground to make it completely firm. If your ground is still very uneven, rake over again and repeat this process.
4. Add an even application of all-purpose fertiliser, to nourish your new lawn, and water the ground thoroughly.

Once your ground is prepared you can begin either laying your turf or sowing your seeds. The methods for each are detailed below:

SEED

1. Use long canes to divide your area into square metres, and then measure the correct amount of seed mixture as per the instructions on the packet.
2. Use half your seed mixture to sow your seeds in parallel rows lengthways and then parallel rows widthways to ensure an even spread.
3. Remove your canes and then rake over the area to cover the seeds lightly with soil.
4. Water the whole area thoroughly, and continue to do so in dry weather. You can now also add netting, if you think birds stealing your seeds is going to be an issue.
5. Try to avoid using your lawn for the first season it has been laid. It will take up to six weeks to grow, and you may need to go back and fill in bare patches along the way. Once the grass has grown to be about 2-3inches, you can mow your lawn.

TURF

1. Once you have bought your turf, try to lay it within three days or it may start to crack and rot if left rolled up for too long. Lay your first roll at the edge of your lawn area.
2. Place a plank over your first rolled out section of turf to work on your second adjacent roll, to avoid damaging your new turf. Lay your turf as tightly as you can up against each other, in a brickwork fashion.
3. Cut the edges of your turf using a half-moon edging knife, and fill gaps using loose soil.
4. Use a stiff brush to remove any soil debris and then water thoroughly, making sure the water seeps right through to the soil underneath.
5. Make sure you water your turf regularly for the first couple of weeks, and avoid heavy traffic. You can mow your lawn after two weeks, using a slightly raised mower blade.

Year-Round Maintenance

It seems obvious, but curing problems once they have already occurred is a lot more difficult than preventing them in the first instance. Turning the sprinkler on regularly during periods of low rainfall is a much more effective method than rushing out and drowning your lawn once you can already see brown patches appearing.

The same goes for other regular jobs such as mowing; if you wait for it to get overgrown and then suddenly give it the number one all over, you could actually be doing it more harm than good. On this page you will find the basic jobs required to keeping a stunning lawn and the equipment you will need. On the following pages I will go through each season in more detail.

Essential Equipment:



LAWNMOWER



SPRING-TINE RAKE



GARDEN FORK
OR AERATOR



HOSE
OR
SPRINKLER



STRIMMER OR
LONG-HANDLED
SHEARS



WATERING CAN
(For applying feeds,
weed killers, etc.)

Essential Jobs:

WATERING

Here in the UK, our lawns are among the best because we rarely suffer from drought. During longer dry spells however, the lawn will very quickly dry out, so watering becomes a necessary task. Water once a week as soon as your grass loses its springiness, and do it during cooler parts of the day, such as in the morning or evening is best.

Make sure your ground is soaked to a depth of about four inches, otherwise the water will run off the top of the baked ground. Take care not to water too frequently, as this will lead to moss.

FEEDING

Different fertilisers contain different nutrients, which your lawn needs at different times of the year. A nitrogen based fertiliser is essential in spring, and one containing phosphates and potash should be used in autumn. When feeding, try to do it at least once during the season. Try to pick a time when the grass is dry but the soil underneath is moist, or perhaps when rain is forecast for later in the day. If it doesn't rain for two days after feeding, make sure you also water your turf.

Even distribution is essential to avoid scorching, so if you have trouble spreading it evenly, perhaps buy a top lawn containing colourant so you can see the areas you have already covered, or use a wheeled mechanical distributor.

MOWING

Your first mow should be in springtime, and you must remember to set the blades to a higher cut to give your grass a chance to recover from the winter. In summer you should be cutting your lawn to about an inch, and try to do it twice a week if you can. Cut slightly higher in spring and autumn.

Never mow on wet grass, and remove all debris from the lawn before you start. Mow forwards in parallel lines, going over sections at the top and bottom with a perpendicular line. Always make sure your mower is fully powered off before you make any adjustments to it.

To neaten edges and areas that your mower can't reach, use long-handled shears or a mechanical trimmer. Make sure you remove clippings afterwards to prevent cut bits of grass from rooting in the soil.

SPRING

Your lawn

has survived the winter.

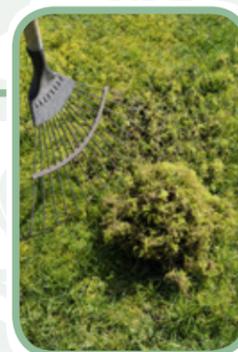
It may have emerged from the soaking, sunless wilderness perhaps looking slightly worse for the wear, and definitely in need of some TLC. Good job you're here to coax it back to life ready for one long dry summer (here's hoping!).

Due to a lack of sunlight over the winter months, coupled with rain and possibly snow as well, your lawn could well have large areas of very damp, dark or even dead grass at this time of year. If it has been a mild, wet winter, you might even have a moss epidemic on your hands. It might seem daunting at first, especially on your first venture out into the chilly spring air – but fear not! Your lawn is ready to thrive again and with a little helping hand from you, it will soon be ready to roll out the BBQ come summer.

1.

When mowing for the first few times after winter, put your blades at a higher setting, only taking around a third of the grass off. Taller grass means deeper roots, which all helps to create a healthy living lawn. You can change back to the shorter setting once your lawn has settled back into spring. Make sure you don't ever mow your lawn when it is damp, as this will only do more harm than good.

2.



Clear mossy areas using a fan-shaped rake to draw the moss out. Be as light-handed as possible with your rake, taking care not to tear vulnerable grasses.

Spring Lawn Shopping List:

- Fan-shaped rake
- Spring fertiliser containing moss and weed killer
- Mixed lawn seed

6.

Your lawn will be hungry after its winter hibernation, make sure to feed it using a spring fertiliser.



4.

To remove bumps or uneven surfaces, cut a H-shaped incision over the bump and then peel back some turf from the centre of the H. Remove some soil underneath and then lay the turf back down, compressing the edges back together, watering in well.

5.



Begin watering your lawn, especially after re-seeding, in order to promote new growth.

A great way to use your lawn in spring is....

Why not take a book and cup of coffee out in the early spring sun to relax and appreciate the emerging spring garden. Try to discourage too much rough child's play this month – your lawn is doing its best to recover!

3.



Cover bare patches liberally with fresh seed, loosening the soil first of all and then raking over afterwards to cover the seeds with a thin layer of soil. You might want to go ahead and do your whole lawn if it is in really bad shape – see the section on sowing your lawn from seed to help with this. Remember to buy the right seed for your garden; your dead patches could be the result of using the wrong type of seed mix.

SUMMER

Summer is your lawn's busiest

season. The kids are playing footie every other day, the dog is desperate for a game of fetch, and lawnmowers from all around can be heard buzzing from dawn 'till dusk. You dream of the BBQ you will hold, and all the neighbours from far and wide will proclaim yours the lawn that dreams are made of - a luscious green, clipped to perfection in stripe formation, able to withstand all manner of garden games.

All this and more could be yours, as long as you don't leave your lawn to the dogs. A few weekly maintenance jobs, and your lawn will be the essence of garden entertaining.

1. Mow, mow, mow your lawn. Once June hits your lawn will be in need of a weekly if not bi-weekly trim. To intensify that coveted stripe pattern, make sure your mowing blades are sharp, and cut the grass slightly higher. Longer blades of grass bend more easily, and the grass bending in different ways is what causes the stripes. You can also go over it with a lawn roller for special occasions.

2. If you are away on holiday for longer than a week, make lawn-cutting arrangements in your absence. If you can't, make sure you cut it slightly higher when you first get back, to allow it to recover.



Summer Lawn Shopping List:

- Lawn Roller – for that extra summer wow factor
- Weed Killer
- Sprinkler system (also great for hot days with the kids!)

3. All this garden entertaining is thirsty work! During dry spells, try to water your lawn using a sprinkler or hose. If your lawn begins to look slightly off-colour, treat it to a feed using a nitrogen-rich fertiliser.



4. Weeds might begin to spring up, and creeping plants such as clover can become a real problem. Pulling out larger weeds as and when they pop up is the best way to keep things under control. Raking before you mow can also help with the spread of creeping varieties such as clover, pearlwort and/or yarrow.

5. Edge your lawn regularly to keep things looking neat.



A great way to use your lawn in summer is...

Did someone say BBQ? Not much beats that sizzle of sausages, glasses clinking and kids laughing as they play in the sprinkler. Don't forget to enjoy your lawn in its finest hour!

AUTUMN

It's tempting

to forget about the lawn as we start to use it less in the autumn, but there are actually a few key jobs to do in the autumn that will revitalise your lawn, prepare it for winter, and keep it looking healthy into the colder months.

Many gardeners tend to feed in spring and focus on grass growth, but after a summer of heavy use and hot weather, lawns can get worn out. Proper care in autumn will help root growth and make your lawn healthier in the long run. Now is the perfect time to carry out any treatments, as there is time for the grass to respond before the temperatures get too low. Your lawn is gearing up for another winter season, so preparation is a key factor in your lawn care this season. You'll want to make sure it will be able to withstand periods of wet and dark weather, saving you time and effort in the spring.

3.



Feed your lawn using an autumn fertiliser. Autumn versions are high in phosphates and potash, which boost strong root growth. As a general rule of thumb, if your lawn is dry, use a liquid feed. If rain is forecast you can use a granular feed. However, if it doesn't rain for a few days after application, water in the granules so they don't burn the grass foliage.

1.



The first step to autumn lawn care is scarifying, which is essentially heavy raking. This will remove thatch - a fine layer of old grass stems, dead moss and other debris that can get compacted between the grass blades over time and can impede water and fertilizer from reaching the soil below. You need to rake vigorously to loosen the thatch, but not so deep that you damage the turf itself. Scarifying will also remove moss, and loose debris like leaves that may be falling onto your grass in droves, smothering it and providing shelter for pests and disease.

2.

Keep mowing your lawn until it stops growing, and be thorough with removing your grass clippings.



Aerating (or spiking) is another important autumn task. Many lawns suffer from

compaction - when they get trampled on, the soil compacts, and this means that oxygen can't get to the grass roots. To aerate, push a garden fork about 5 inches into the soil throughout the lawn, spacing the holes about 5 inches apart. On clay or waterlogged soils you may want to use a hollow-tine aerator which will extract plugs of soil each time. You can also buy motorised aerators, or even spiked shoes that you use to walk over the lawn!

4.



5.

Re-seed any bare patches using the same method as in spring time.



Autumn Lawn Shopping List:

- Autumn Fertiliser containing phosphates
- Aerator (or garden fork)
- Rake

A great way to use your lawn in autumn is...

Pumpkin Carving! Get the kids to help you make your Halloween decorations; it's a messy job that's perfect for the garden. Make sure to scoop up the pumpkin scraps for your compost bin.

WINTER

It might seem

like your lawn completely shuts up shop for the winter, but in actual fact it is undergoing a constant battle for survival underneath all that rain and frost. You might feel like all you can do is helplessly watch from the side-lines, but there are a few ways you can plan and prepare for spring, that will save you time and hassle when March finally rolls around.

If a whole year has passed and you have been really battling with brown patches or persistent weeds and moss throughout the year, then it might be a problem to do with your actual grass, or that you have the wrong type for your garden. A sun-loving grass type in a very shady garden will be a constant uphill battle. Now is a good time to reflect on whether your current lawn is giving you too much grief, and perhaps make plans to lay or sow a new lawn. November is a good month to lay new turf, and this can also be done during finer spells in December or January, but don't attempt to sow seeds until the weather starts to pick up at the end of February.

3.



Keep on raking away leaves and other debris throughout winter. Your lawn needs all the light it can get during this season. Make sure to keep moving any furniture such as climbing frames or rabbit runs around the grass.

1.



Before you pack away your mower for the winter, be sure to give it a good clean. Clean or replace the air filter, replace the spark plug and empty the fuel tank by letting the mower run until it is completely empty. Check your manufacturer's instructions if you are unsure and leave it empty until the first mow in spring. Drain out your engine oil and re-fill to the manufacturers recommendations.

2.

Clean, oil and store all other tools such as edging shears.



4.

Try to avoid walking on your lawn when it is wet or frozen, as this can harm the fragile grass. Put boards down if you are wheeling any heavy loads over it.

6.

Before spring arrives, sharpen your mower blades ready for the first trim.



5.

Try to have any new turfing done by the end of February, and if the weather is good, you can begin soil preparation for sowing seeds at this time as well.



Winter Lawn Shopping List:

- Engine oil
- Air filters and spark plug for your mower
- New turf or grass seed if you are making a new lawn

A great way to use your lawn in winter is...

What would Christmas be without a little Boxing Day footie? If the weather is dry, it's a great way to burn off those turkey sandwiches. When snow falls, the lawn is the perfect blank canvas for all your snow creations – not to mention snowball fights!

WHICH MOWER IS FOR YOU?

The Electric Mower

The People's Choice

- Suitable for small to medium lawns, as they need recharging after an hour or so
- Quiet and low maintenance with less fuel costs than petrol
- No emissions, so are good for the environment



The Push Mower

The Purist

- Suitable for smaller lawns
- No fuel costs, and are often the cheapest to buy and easiest to maintain
- More physically demanding – great if you want to burn more calories!



The Ride Mower

The Heavy Hitter

- Suitable for large lawns, generally an acre or more
- Most people find ride-on mowers more fun
- More expensive and can be difficult to manoeuvre



The Petrol Mower

The All-Rounder

- Suitable for most lawn sizes under an acre
- Sufficient power to cut through tough grass and weeds
- Ease of mobility for corners compared with ride-on mower



COMMON LAWN TROUBLES AND HOW TO CURE THEM

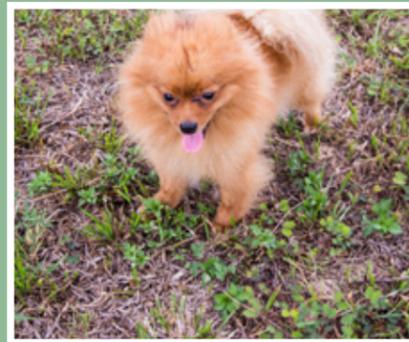
Problems with your lawn, if not caused by neglect, can be attributed to one of three main causes; pests, diseases or weeds. If you have been mowing, feeding and watering your lawn correctly, as well as carrying out season specific jobs such as aerating and scarifying, any further problems should be identified by their cause and then cured.

PESTS

Wildlife, household pets and even your kids can all contribute to problems with your lawn, and as charming as these garden critters can be, if it is a perfect lawn you seek then they will have to be dealt with in the appropriate manner. Some of the most common lawn pests are detailed below, along with ways to avoid or cure the problem.

Female Dogs

Your beloved pet could be causing small brown patches on your lawn where she urinates. Try to train her to urinate away from the lawn, or else you will be re-seeding patches of earth near constantly. You can also buy a liquid to put in her food that can help with the problem as well.



Kids Play

Goal penalty kick spots, cricket batting and wicket spots, in fact any hard play can cause problems with your lawn. Re-seed every year with a tough, hardwearing grass mix like lesser timothy. Try to discourage rough play in spring as your lawn recovers.



Moles

Moles that are digging tunnels in your lawn can quite quickly cause havoc. Deter them by placing something that smells bad down their tunnels, such as old cheese. You can also try sonar mole repellents, which emit a high-pitched noise to drive them away.



Ants

Anthills can be a problem during summer if you have particularly sandy soil, and they can cause root damage to your turf. Before mowing, scatter the anthills by sweeping them thoroughly, or use some ant killer from your local garden centre.

DISEASES

Just like the other shrubs and plants in your garden, the lawn is susceptible to disease. It's easy to confuse diseased grass with a lawn that has simply not been looked after properly, as the symptoms are often the same. Make sure you eliminate all other possibilities before you assume the worst.

Red Thread

Caused by a nitrogen deficiency, this will appear in late summer and will cause patches of uneven brownish grass that may also have a light red tinge to it. To distinguish between this and dried out grass, look for small red growths protruding between grass blades.

To avoid this disease, make sure you are feeding your lawn in spring and summer, and try not to mow your lawn too short over summer. To cure an already infected lawn, use a fungicide from your local garden centre.



Snow Mould

Another common fungal infection that usually springs up in autumn, or after long periods of snow, this can be identified as small patches of yellowing grass that may then merge to produce larger patches of brown grass with a white mould at the edges.

Try to avoid this disease by spiking the turf regularly and not using a fertiliser containing nitrogen during the autumn months. To cure an infected area, you can use fungicides from your local garden centre.



Fairy Rings

Fairy rings are ring-shaped formations of toadstools. They are not commonly considered an issue, but if you have fairy rings made up of certain toadstools, it can cause a bare or moss ridden patch of grass alongside the toadstools themselves.

Prevent fairy rings by always making sure all debris is removed from underneath the lawn before laying new turf or sowing seed, and maintaining your lawn properly. Unfortunately, there is no real cure for this apart from removing the turf and topsoil and replacing with new, taking care not to spill any infected turf as you do so.



Lichen

You will most often find this underneath trees, where your lawn is very shaded and gets a concentrated amount of water causing damp soil. Raking out annually should eradicate the problem temporarily, but to prevent a re-occurrence, make sure you are regularly spiking this area as well as applying plenty of fertiliser, ensuring good drainage.



WEEDS

We're used to the war on weeds in our beds and borders, but there are also a lot of weeds that can invade our lovely lawns as well. Weeds that get in amongst our grass can not only shade the grass with their larger leaves, they will also suck all the vital nutrients that your grass needs, leaving it looking sad and off-coloured.

Larger weeds will often be eradicated by regular mowing, but mat and creeping varieties of weeds such as clover and moss will escape unharmed and be able to continue spreading. Again, if you are maintaining your lawn correctly, you shouldn't have too much trouble with invaders, but when a few slip through the net, it is useful to know how to eradicate them effectively.

There are two main methods, depending on the scale of the weed invasion you are dealing with: hand weeding or chemical weeding.

Hand weeding

A technique that is useful for the odd, persistent weed – simply dig it out to the roots using a knife or trowel and then fill the hole with compost. For a larger area of creeping weeds, you can also rake the area in an upwards direction before mowing. This drags the stems up so that they are cut by the mower.



Non-chemical weeding

Many people use large quantities of chemical weed control on their lawns, but I don't recommend this as chemical weed killers are bad for the environment and can harm beneficial wildlife, organisms and can even cause harm to your pets and children. They can also ruin a new lawn, or recently reseeded areas. Luckily, there are plenty of non-chemical methods of weed control that we can use.

First of all, establishing a good routine of feeding, fertilising, aerating and scarifying will encourage vigorous grass growth, making it difficult for weeds to compete. Try to avoid cutting your grass too short, as this can weaken the blades and make it easier for creeping weed varieties such as pearlwort to sneak in. An outbreak of clover often signals a nitrogen or water deficiency, so make sure not to skip your spring fertiliser and water during dry spells. Dandelions like a slightly acidic soil, so you can dress your soil with a little lime to combat them.

Larger, individual weeds can be spot treated by mixing five parts vinegar, two parts water and one part washing-up liquid into a hand pump sprayer and carefully spaying the weed. Take care as you do this as vinegar can also burn grass. For clumps of coarse grass, use an edging iron to slash through the tufts before mowing. Corkscrew weeders also make light work of tap rooted weeds. You might find organic weed killers at your local garden centre that you can safely use on your grass, but always check the instructions before applying.



Top Tips To Remember

Mind how you mow...

Don't forget that mowing your lawn too short, or too infrequently can cause a whole host of problems. Simple changes to your routine, such as setting the blades a little higher at certain times of the year, and making sure your mower is in tip top condition, can really make the world of difference.

Test the waters...

Don't forget that over-watering and scorching your turf with fertiliser is just as harmful as letting it dry out or go hungry. Different grasses have different needs and some are more drought resistant than others. During dry spells, try watering a little at first, and then you can check back to see if your grass needs more. The same goes for fertiliser, you can always give it a second feed later in the season, but scorched turf is difficult to fix.

Let there be light...

At the end of the day, grass is a plant like any other, and needs light to survive. Raking dead leaves away regularly, as well as moving any lawn furniture around should hopefully stop too much light blockage. Weed removal, as well as pruning overhanging trees and shrubs can also be game changers, if it is light that your lawn is lacking. Always cut higher than the recommended length if your grass needs an extra boost, as longer grass has more surface area with which to photosynthesise.

The grass is always greener...

And finally, don't forget to enjoy your lawn! More than likely, it's there to be played upon as well as admired. Professional greenkeepers have copious amounts of time and money to keep their lawns in such mint condition, so don't be hard on yourself if yours is a little more rough and ready. A hardwearing lawn full of laughter and amusement will be much more rewarding than a lawn that looks impeccable, but feels like a burden on your resources.

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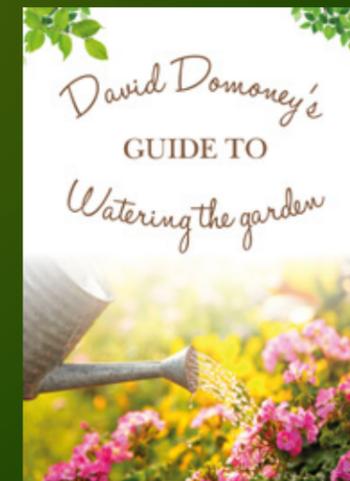
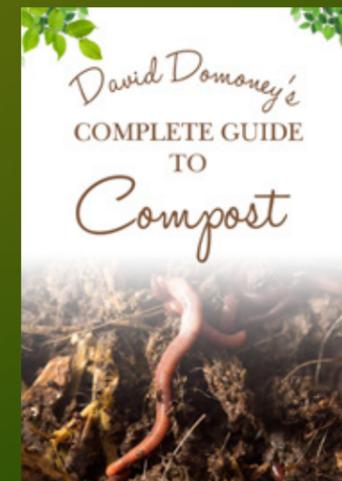
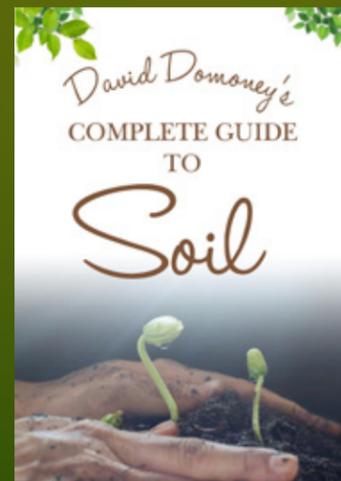
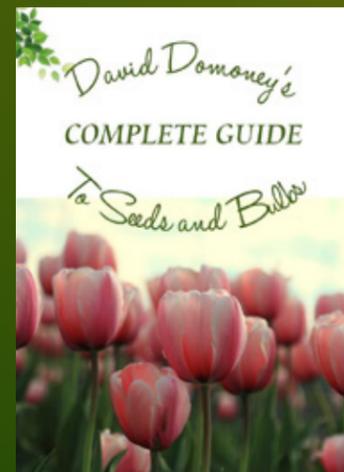
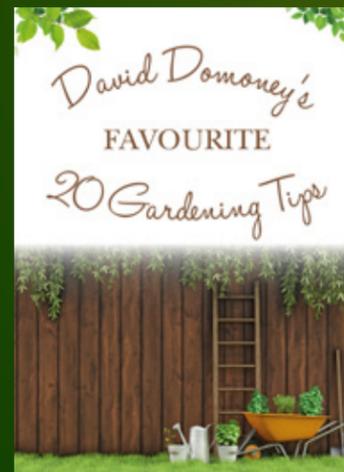
Lawn care jobs don't always have to be a chore – the satisfaction you can get from mowing the lawn on a fine summers day, with the smell of fresh grass clippings in the air, is actually pretty hard to beat, as gardening jobs go. And a rich, bright, well-kept lawn is its own reward.

So get out there and get the healthy, happy lawn that you deserve!



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