

Lawn Hacker
Peter Mitchell

The backyard of our new house is a sea of mud and weeds. It is time to plant a lawn. We called to lawn services to talk about it.

I see the problem is this. We need to plant the sturdy lawn for kids to run on. It will never appear in Architectural Digest or House Beautiful. It will sometimes be ignored – not cut or watered exactly as it would like. I'm looking for an optimal trade-off among cost, effort, and present them ability.

Lawn service companies I talked to see it differently. They see me as a solution to their problem: how to make quota this month, and a fat bonus. They talk about rolls of sod and automatic sprinkler systems. They say the lawn will die without the diligent application of water provided by an automated system. The fact that this has never happened in my 50 years'and experience with lawns doesn't seem to sway them.

What's the solution? This book! It arms me with all of the information that I need to face down these experts. Take it from the top.

First and foremost I learned that I need to check the soil pH. I already knew this, but neither of the lawn experts I called brought the subject up. In America you can go to your local agricultural extension, or get a soil testing kit very easily. I live in Ukraine. Wikihow has a couple of recommendations for do-it-yourself soil tests. One of them uses red cabbage, which probably has the same chemical as litmus paper. I just bought a cabbage and I'll see how it works. But, in any case, the first step to solving a problem is to understand it. Understanding soil pH is essential to planning a good lawn.

The second essential is to know your soil type. Ours is sandy, which drains well but doesn't hold water. The opposite of a clay soil. Certain kinds of grasses do better in sandy soil. The garden center folks gave me prices for rolls of sod without saying a word about what kind of grass was planted in them. Both of them want to sell me dirt to put under their sod. Reading his book leads me to believe that the dirt that I have is probably good enough.

The third question is whether it's sunny or shady. In our situation, like most, the conditions vary from place to place throughout the property. We want to plant different kinds of grass in different places. My suspicion is that a garden center working with sod would use the same kind throughout.

I don't mind paying for value, so I will listen to the proposals from the garden center experts. But if they don't touch these common sense points that this book describes, my conclusion is going to be that I can do it myself with a Rototiller and a little bit of hard work and come up with a better result at a lower price.

For five dollars for the book and an hour to read it this is indeed a bargain. It is like talking to the smart neighbor you wish you had. Easily a five-star effort.