

IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

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After talking to a number of visitors to the Garden in recent weeks it struck me how appreciation of its contents is equally divided between the sexes: 99% of men compliment the lush green of the lawn while their female partners always comment on the colour schemes in the borders. This observation made me realise that I am a prime example of such stereo-typing, having spent much of my horticultural life concentrating on plant choices and their positioning before paying any attention to the state of the lawn. It also made me wonder whether lawns are just a 'man' thing, the reason why I cannot recall ever having met a grounds-woman.

However, since arriving in the Inner Temple, I have come to realise that a well-kept lawn is as important to the whole effect of a garden as finely-nurtured flower beds, and I have also come to appreciate how much effort is involved in ensuring that it is in the best of health. Indeed, a lawn requires the same level of care as the most intricately planted herbaceous border.

The weather, particularly the temperature, dictates the pattern of our turf maintenance schedule, and it usually isn't warm enough for us to start the process until the end of February, initially tackling the most worn areas by hand. These patches are scarified with a springbok rake and the compacted areas spiked with a garden fork, after which a sandy top-dressing is applied to improve drainage followed by sowing grass seeds, and the areas are then covered with netting to prevent the



resident pigeons undoing all our work. It is only after this six-week stretch of manually raking and spiking over 1000 square metres, shifting 6 tonnes of dressing, sowing over 25kg of seed and pegging down great swathes of netting that we are able to deploy some motorised machinery to tackle the less damaged areas.

At this stage I am known to voice the opinion that astro-turf has much to recommend it, but then the seeds germinate, the netting comes off and the fresh growth of the grass adds an extra dimension to the burgeoning colour in the surrounding borders and the filling canopies of the trees above it. A lawn is not just a stretch of colour, but a vibrant part of the natural world, as sensitive to the same environmental variables as a beautiful flower and deserving the same respect.

My better understanding of caring for a lawn has had the annoying side-effect of interrupting my enjoyment of Wimbledon, wincing as Andy Murray's feet scrape another dozen plants off the Wimbledon turf, so that I miss his winning ace. It has also made me appreciate what the grounds-men of such arenas achieve, but it hasn't made me change my view that lawn-care isn't going to become a female preserve any time soon.



Job done