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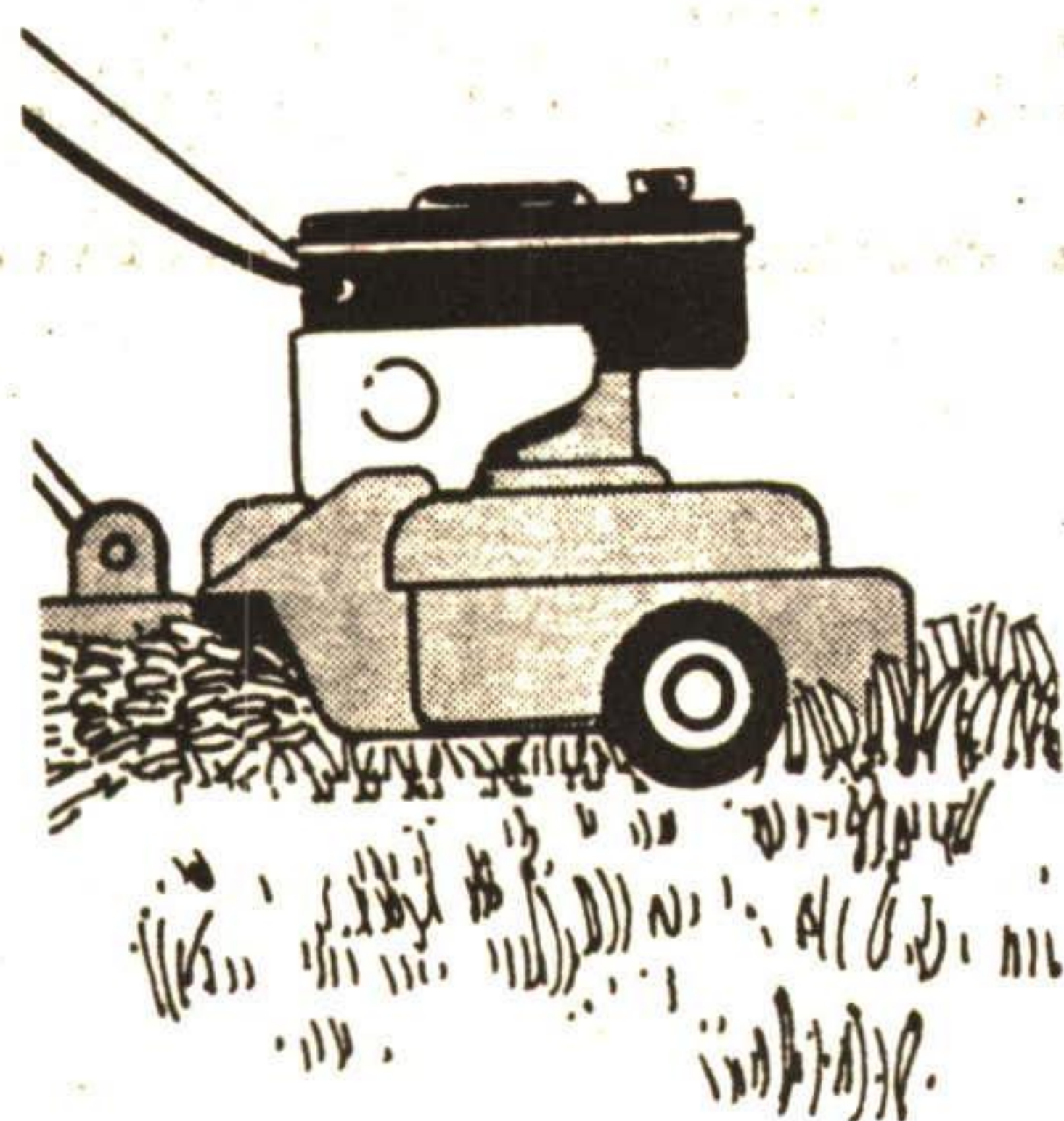
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It's Time To Mow The Lawn Once More

In the excitement of buying and planting seeds, don't neglect the mainstay of your garden such as the lawn, roses and other specimen bushes.

Perhaps surprisingly, you can start mowing the lawn this month when the surface is dry, but set the blades about an inch higher than ground level to avoid "scalping" early growth.

It is a time when the old-style cylinder also comes into its own as the grass will benefit from a light rolling, but don't do it just after rain or frost.

You can pick out areas of lawn requiring repairs and be ready to seed them as the soil warms.

The finishing touch to your lawn treatment is a good feed with a proprietary lawn fertilizer.

Turning to the roses, aim to complete all pruning of established roses by early spring and ensure that you cut away any dead, blighted, frost-damaged or deformed growth.

Cut spindly shoots back to a healthy outward-facing bud, before routinely pruning the rest of last year's growth, and establishing a balanced look.

The amount of pruning does depend on the rose variety. Specimen HT varieties need cut-

ting back hard - up to two-thirds of last season's growth.

But free-blooming Floribundas need less drastic treatment, while hedge roses need lopping only by a quarter - more is likely to cause a surge of growth lower down and spoil the look of the hedge.

Once pruned, your roses should then be fed with a rose fertilizer raked into the soil in a circle and then mulched to keep weeds at bay.

Or, you can plant a carpet of yellow alyssum or another handsome ground cover variety such as lavender.

While you have the pruners out, check on the growth of other bushes and shrubs.

If you have a greenhouse or want one, this is the month when a cool type starts to come in handy for starting varieties of flowers and vegetables.

It is particularly useful for trays of seeds for half-hardy flowers such as alyssum, asters, begonias, helichrysum, lobelia, marigolds, nemesia, petunias, stocks, salvias and zinnias.

Even if you have no greenhouse, these can be grown under glass or on a windowsill.

The resulting seedlings are strong and keen to establishing themselves when planted after all risk of frost is past.

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