

# Dear John:



John Deere Answers Your Lawn and Garden Woes

## Side Order of Flowers

Dear John: As a short-order cook, I usually take orders, but now I'd like to place one. Can you suggest a flower I can plant next year to garnish my garden walk?

Dear Sizzlin' Rosie: There's a wide variety of beautiful flowers on the menu this spring. Today's special is called sweet alyssum. With this densely-flowered, 4- to 6-inch/10 to 12 cm tall annual, you'll cook up an attractive garden edging.

Sweet alyssum has an average spread of about 8 to 16 inches/20 to 40 cm and a blossom period during May and June. They're hardy plants that can survive temperatures down even below freezing level. Full sunlight is best, but the flowers also will thrive in a half-day of sunlight.

Both the white and purple varieties are easy to find at garden centers. Select the color that whets your appetite — but be aware that the white variety offers a larger serving of flowers.

Dear John: My wife likes to keep a tidy home, so she wants me to collect grass clippings. I hate to throw anything away — how can I satisfy both our whims?

Dear Neat & Thrifty: If you mow often enough so that only one-third of the grass blade is removed at each cutting, clippings can actually be good for your lawn. They return nitrogen

to the soil. Short clippings — about 1/2 inch/10 mm long — can help your grass retain moisture. Clippings longer than that, however, can contribute to thatch. So can roughly chopped leaves — especially oak leaves — because they take a long time to break down.

So even though you don't always have to collect clippings, if you do, you can help your lawn and make your wife happy at the same time. Bagging debris gives a lawn a well-cared-for appearance and removes leaves easily. If you can't bear to throw clippings away, use them as a mulch or add them to your compost pile — but wait four mowings after applying a lawn pesticide.

Dear John: Can you please tell me what a "complete" fertilizer is and what it will do for my lawn?

Dear Fact-Finder: A complete fertilizer contains nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Nitrogen promotes blade growth and a deep, green color, so it's important for a lawn fertilizer to have plenty of nitrogen. Phosphorus promotes root growth, and potassium helps a lawn resist disease. Use a fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus to potassium, and never apply more than one pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet/100 sq. m. of lawn at each feeding.

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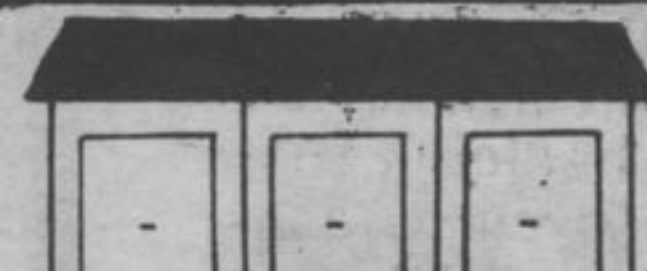
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