

FIELD TEST

MOSS REMOVAL PRODUCTS

Over the past eight months, we tested four popular products to remove moss from roofs. Here's what we found.

By Peter A. Robson



The roof was divided into four metre sections: Products used were, (left to right): De-Moss, Moss B Gon, 30 Seconds Spray and Walk Away, Roof Wash, the control section and an untouched section of roof. The most effective products were Roof Wash and Moss B Gon.

THERE ARE TWO SCHOOLS of thought about roof moss. One says to leave it because it doesn't really harm things, while the other says get rid of it. I'm of the school that moss buildup can eventually destroy a roof, regardless of the roofing material. Insurance companies agree and may insist that moss buildup be removed. If it isn't done, they can decline to insure against roof damage.

Moss was beginning to accumulate on my 12-year-old asphalt-shingle roof and I wasn't sure what to do about it. I'd heard about using a stiff brush, nailing on zinc strips (which I tried and didn't find effective), sprinkling powdered laundry soap and installing a galvanized roof cap. I even considered hiring a moss removal company.

In the end, I decided to experiment with several chemical moss removal products on my asphalt-shingled woodshed. Then I'd have a better idea of what to use on the roof of the cottage.

The first step was to visit several hardware stores and see what they recommended. I ended up with four products: Safer's De-Moss, Scotts Eco Sense Moss B Gon, 30 Seconds: Spray and Walk Away roof treatment and Wash Safe Canada's Roof Wash.

The second step was to divide the woodshed roof into strips, one for each product and a "control" strip that I'd simply hose off with water. Each strip

was four metres square.

The shed roof was really a mess: the moss was at least an inch thick. Perhaps I should have brushed or washed it off before applying the products, but I wanted to give them a real challenge.

Each of the products, except Roof Wash, is a liquid concentrate to be mixed with water. Roof Wash is a powdered formula-



tion, but also to be mixed with water.

We won't get into chemistry here, but briefly: the active ingredient in De-Moss is potassium salts of fatty acids (soap salts). The active ingredient in Moss B Gon is potassium laurate. The active ingredients in Spray and Walk Away are bleach and trisodium phosphate. Roof Wash is formulated from sodium percarbonate, a granular form of hydrogen peroxide—an oxygen bleach commonly used in a wide range of oxygen-based cleaning products. All of these products are more or less harmless to the environment and don't require any special safety measures when applying. Traditionally zinc sulphate was a popular moss removal chemical, but it has proven very harmful to the environment and is seldom used today.

APPLICATION On September 8, 2012, with no rain for the past month and none in the forecast, I carefully mixed and measured the products exactly per the instructions and used a hand-pump garden sprayer to apply them. The first thing I noticed was that to saturate the moss, I had to use an average of 20 percent more product on each four-metre section than the instructions called for. Upon completion, only one section showed any marked difference. The hydrogen peroxide in the Roof Wash immediately turned the moss dark brown, which was impressive. The other products discoloured slightly the following day, but were advertised to take about a week or so to kill moss.

A WEEK LATER On September 15 it was still dry and I took a hose to the roof to see how it would wash off. I used a special brass nozzle (available at most hardware stores) on the end of the hose. The nozzle would increase the hose water pressure to about 400 psi. I didn't want to use a pressure washer as too much pressure can remove the grit that protects the asphalt.

Perhaps I should have just left the treated areas alone to see what happened over time, but the idea was to get rid of the moss immediately. I figured if the products didn't kill the moss in a week, they probably wouldn't kill it at all.

I'd expected the moss (which I presumed

was dead by now) would wash off easily with the high-pressure water, but it took a fair bit of time to get it off, regardless of which product had been used. I also hosed down the "control" section, which hadn't been treated with any products, and it too took the same effort as the sections where moss remover had been applied.

In hindsight, if I were to do it again, I'd probably use a stiff brush to remove the bulk of the moss before applying moss remover.

THREE WEEKS LATER On October 8, I went back up on the roof and hit the few bits of remaining moss with the hose. Again, there was no real difference in the work it took to get rid of the moss, regardless of which section I worked on. Since there'd been no clear winner when it came to physically removing the moss, the real test would be what happened to the few scattered clumps of moss remaining in each section and how long it took for moss to recolonize the roof.



An inexpensive nozzle like this was used to increase normal hose water pressure to about 400 PSI.

After the initial treatment, the most significant difference was the discolouration of the area treated with Roof Wash (fourth section from left).



THE RESULTS Eight months later, on May 10, 2013, I climbed up on the roof again. I couldn't see any evidence of recolonization on any of the test sections (including the non-treated control section). However, the remnant clumps in the sections treated with De-Moss and 30 Second Spray and Walk Away were still alive, as evidenced by their bright green colour and the small stalks and seed pods. Surprisingly, the clump growth in those two sections matched that of the "control" area that hadn't been treated at all, though all the remaining moss in the control section was alive. The other two sections, those treated with Roof Wash and Moss B Gon, had no growth in their remnant clumps. The difference between them was that there was no sign of remnants in the section treated with Roof Wash, while the Moss B Gon sec-

tion still had its clumps, though the remnant moss was dead.

CONCLUSION In my opinion, Roof Wash was the winner. I liked it because it turned brown immediately after application, showing that it was working, and also because the winter rains washed off all the dead moss. Moss B Gon gets second place. While it killed the moss, it didn't wash off during the winter rains, though it may do so in the future. De-Moss and 30 Second Spray and Walk Away didn't kill all the moss, though they killed the majority of it.

Over the next six months, I plan to watch the test areas for recolonization; however, all the product instructions suggest re-applying every six months to a year or when moss begins to regrow on the roof, which makes sense. ●

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www.mealtimestoves.on.ca