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New Book Uncovers Roots of America's Obsession with the Lawn

Springtime is finally here and millions of American property owners have turned their attentions to tending the almighty lawn, the green expanse of turf that helps to frame both the home and its surrounding plants.

As people mow, fertilize, aerate, and—for some obsessives in the thick of the coming summer's dry heat—spray paint their yards, they may wonder how the lawn become such a ubiquitous feature of the American landscape.

A new, illustrated book by author Thomas Mickey, *America's Romance with the English Garden*, digs to the roots of the story of how the American lawn originated in the nineteenth century.

"We love the lawn because the garden industry sold it to us," says Mickey, a master gardener and professor emeritus of communications studies who spent some of his research time as a fellow at the Smithsonian Institution.

Mickey suggests that Americans were "seduced" by the idea of the English garden style of landscaping (noted for its trim, green lawn) thanks to the marketing efforts of nineteenth-century seed and nursery businesses.

In their richly printed catalogs—which had become possible thanks to advances in printing—and with mass mailing—which became possible thanks to cheap paper and railroad transportation—these businesses sold not only plants and seeds, but an image, a landscaping style.

"Though the company owners knew the French, Italian, Spanish, and Dutch gardens, the English garden, with its signature lawn, became the brand to sell seeds and plants in the nineteenth century," says Mickey.

Thanks to the efforts of the seed and nursery businesses, the lawn would become one of the most noted features of the American landscape, appearing across the country from Maine to California.

Ohio University Press publishes *America's Romance with the English Garden* in May. The book features more than forty full-color illustrations and has a retail list price of \$26.95. It is available through booksellers and online.