

Organic Lawn Care Basics

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BUILD HEALTHY SOIL FOR HEALTHY GRASS

- Leave grass clippings on to supply nitrogen.
- Use natural fertilizers such as compost, live compost tea, corn gluten meal (a natural “weed and feed”) and meal from fish, kelp, or legumes to supply nitrogen. See other side for application rates.
- Avoid chemical fertilizers - they harm beneficial organisms and earthworms.
- Consider planting dwarf white clover in your lawn to supply nitrogen. Pre-1950’s lawns were seeded with a mix of grass and clover.
- Aerate established lawns to add oxygen and reduce soil compaction. Core aeration pulls plugs and drops soil back onto lawn.

DISCOURAGE WEEDS

- Mow high (3 to 3 1/2”) to shade out weeds. Lawns with taller grass have fewer weeds. Never cut more than 1/3 off the top of the grass leaf at a time.
- Over-seed (see next section).
- If you water your lawn, water deeply (to 6” down) and infrequently to encourage deep grass roots. It is not necessary to water in hot, dry weather when grass goes dormant; dormant grass will recover in the fall.
- Remove weeds in the spring when plant root reserves are low. Use an upright dandelion digger or pronged grabber tool to pull tap-rooted weeds such as dandelions, thistles, and burdock. Rake or pull creeping Charlie.
- Try corn gluten meal in the early spring and fall to prevent weeds on established lawns. When applied under just the right conditions (~45° soil temp, just enough water), this product prevents crabgrass, dandelions and

other seedlings from growing. Plants sprout but do not make roots. Be aware that it kills grass seedlings as well as weed seedlings. Corn gluten meal adds nitrogen to the soil also. See other side for application rates.

GIVE WEEDS STIFF COMPETITION

- Select the grass seed mix that is appropriate for the amount of light your lawn receives. In sun add dwarf clover.
- Over-seed your lawn in spring and fall. Grass grows best in cool weather. Starting more grass plants will thicken the lawn and prevent weeds from sprouting.
- Sprinkle grass seed on bare spots after weeding.

GET TO KNOW YOUR LAWN

Does your lawn have problem areas? Many common lawn problems such as weeds, thin grass, and bare spots occur because of compacted soil, planting grass in the wrong location, or lack of nutrients. Grass rarely thrives in shady areas or high traffic areas. Consider shade-loving ground covers and paths instead.

TOLERATE PLANT DIVERSITY IN YOUR YARD

Lawns will always have some weeds and some insects. Even heavily treated lawns have weeds. Weed seeds blow in from other yards and are carried by feet and dropped by birds. Avoid pesticides and tolerate a few weeds for the greater good of the environment and our health.

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QUICK REFERENCE CALENDAR

April	Sharpen mower blades, tune mower. Set mower height to 3-3 1/2". Edge paths. Begin mowing. Leave grass clippings on lawn. To over-seed clover use 2 oz dwarf white clover/1000 ft ² in early April. You can mix it with grass seed. Mow to 2" until clover sprouts. Don't apply corn gluten meal if you over-seeded. To stop weed seedlings from rooting apply corn gluten meal in dry weather at the rate of 12 lbs/1000 ft ² . Time it for weed seed germination, which occurs when early daffodils and yellow forsythia shrubs bloom. Lightly water it in.
May	Aerate, and if thatch is a problem use a power rake.
Late May Early June	Figure out your nitrogen needs. Sunny lawns need 2-3 lbs nitrogen/1000 ft ² per year and shady lawns 1-1.5 lbs. Never apply more than 1 lb nitrogen/1000 ft ² at one time. Use natural sources, such as compost, live compost tea, manure, fish meal or vegetable meal fertilizer. Corn gluten meal provides 1 lb nitrogen/1000 ft ² . If you plan 2 nitrogen applications make the first one now (Memorial Day). Don't apply nitrogen now if you recently used corn gluten meal.
April-June	Dig or rake creeping Charlie; dig dandelions, burdock, thistle, and other perennial weeds. This is the most effective time of year to weed since root reserves are at their lowest and soil is moist. You can pull 5 dandelions/minute.
July-August	Grass growth is at its slowest point. Don't mow on schedule; mow when grass height is above 3". This is usually the hottest and driest part of summer. Consider letting grass go dormant; do not water.
August	Review yard use patterns and landscaping. Do you need a natural path? A shady groundcover area? A different grass seed mix? Fall is an excellent time to plant. If crabgrass has set seed, apply corn gluten meal again but only if you do not plan to plant grass seed later this fall.
August 15 to September 15	Over-seed established lawn with 2- 3 lbs of grass seed/1000 ft ² . Plant new areas to lawn if needed. Use a grass seed mix for your location, either sun or shade.
September	Aerate again if needed. Do another edging if needed.
October	Rake leaves and compost them.
October 15-31	Apply nitrogen fertilizer. Use compost, manure, fish meal, or vegetable meal fertilizer. Apply 1 lb nitrogen/1000 ft ² . If you recently used corn gluten meal, don't apply nitrogen now. If you apply nitrogen once a year, do it now; if twice a year, do it Memorial Day and Halloween.

For more details on lawn care see www.healthylawnteam.org
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