



Easy Steps to Growing A Healthy Lawn:

Reduce the Use of Pesticides

Raise your Mower Height and Keep Mower Blades Sharp

Once a year sharpen your lawnmower blades. A sharp cut keeps the lawn healthier and more resistant to disease. Set your lawn mower to 2 ½" to 3" (8 cm) leaving the grass high after a cut. Tall grass crowds out weeds, shade roots and preserve soil moisture. Avoid cutting off more than 1/3 (1" / 2 cm) of the grass blade at a time, mowing lower stresses the grass. Think "lush" instead of "scalped"! Your grass should still look green after a mow. If you don't "do-it-yourself", tell your landscaper how high you want your lawn mown.

Leave Clippings on the Grass

After mowing leave grass clippings on the lawn. They're a great free fertilizer. Clippings do not cause thatch. Thatch is created from grass stems, shoots and roots (not clippings) on the surface of the soil that do not break down. Some thatch is okay, but anything over ½" (1 cm) can lead to problems because it is a perfect haven for insects and disease, and prevents moisture from reaching the roots of your grass, making it more susceptible to drought. The best time to de-thatch your lawn is in the fall. Get rid of it by using a heavy rake and putting it in your compost bin.

Aerate your Lawn

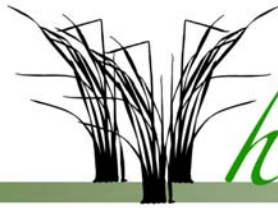
If it hasn't been done for several seasons and the soil is hard, dry and compact now is the time to aerate. Aeration gives roots room to grow, helps nutrients and water reach the roots, gets oxygen into the soil, and helps reduce compaction. Leave the 2" (5 cm) plugs on the lawn or break them up by raking and let them decompose. Avoid rolling your lawn as this increases compaction. Compacted lawns are more prone to dandelions and plantain. Aeration is best done once a year between May and June or in the fall when soil is moist. You can rent an aerator or have a company do it for you.

Fertilize

Don't over fertilize, it weakens the grass. In spring or fall spread (topdress) a thin layer 1/4" (0.5 cm) of certified weed free compost over the lawn. It can be broadcasted easily with a shovel and raked even. Compost adds vital nutrients, beneficial organisms and increases the organic matter for your lawn. Topdressing with compost over time will improve the quality and depth of your soil allowing grass roots the space, air, water and nutrients they need to grow well. After topdressing, overseed with a mixture of hardy grass seeds.

Overseed

Early fall is the best time to re-seed a lawn. Each year invest in a good mix of seed with at least 3 varieties of grass. Look for endophytic varieties, which provide natural protection against some insects and fungal diseases. A light application of compost and overseeding with fescues and ryes that are drought tolerant, will thicken your lawn and crowd out weeds.



Water Wisely

Watering during summer heat and drought is not essential to turf health. A well maintained healthy lawn will recover from dormancy when fall rains arrive. If watering to maintain a green look, when there is no rain, water your lawn once a week. Water deep, a lawn only needs 1" (2 cm) of water per week (one full tuna can). Shallow watering produces plants with shallow roots and are less drought tolerant. If you have an in-ground irrigation system, make sure it has a rain gauge on it. Early morning is the best time to water however, by watering in early evening you will also avoid evaporation. Established organic lawns, with dense turf and deep roots, are drought and pest tolerant. Establishing this type of lawn eliminates pesticide use and reduces water consumption.

Old is New Again

Clover, yarrow and other low growing ground covers are a great mix in the lawn. In days passed lawns were diverse greens. Clover nourishes the grass by providing nitrogen, and is drought tolerant so looks green when other turf species are browning in the heat of summer. Yarrow's light and feathery look and texture feels fantastic to the bare foot. Ajuga gives a blue purple spiked flower in spring, spreads quickly, and provides deep green to walk on all summer.

Repeat As Needed

Repeat these steps annually, as needed, and your lawn will be dense and healthy.

Call the **Yard Improvement Helpline** at **905-540-8787 ext. 18** for tips on natural lawn and garden care and to order a pesticide free lawn sign.