



Monthly Steps to a Healthy Lawn

A bit of planning and healthy lawn care practices, will reduce or eliminate the need for pesticides.

MARCH / APRIL (snowmelt)

- **sharpen mower blades**
- don't walk on soggy "spongy" lawns, this will cause compaction and could cause disease
- once dry, rake your lawn gently to remove debris and dead grass; if lawn is dry, **test your soil**
- **aerate**, if soil is compacted, generally seen in high traffic areas
- inspect for dead patches (salt or pet damage): apply gypsum to damaged areas & **top dress** soil
- **over seed**; consider White Dutch Clover in your **grass seed mix** it provides nitrogen and tolerates drought
- plan to convert shady areas (less than 4 hours sun) to alternative ground covers.

MAY

- **top dress** and **over seed** if you haven't already done so
- **mow high and** after mowing **grass cycle**
- **scout for weeds**, hand pull and fix bare patches by adding **compost** and **over seeding**
- **monitor** for insect damage: see White Grub fact sheet

JUNE

- continue to scout and identify weeds, they are a great indicator of soil requirements; Weeds fact sheet
- hand pull weeds, fill in bare patches with **compost** and **grass seed mix**, keep moist until germinated
- at end of month as grass growth slows, reduce mowing frequency, **grass cycle**
- **monitor** for heat stress, insects and disease

JULY /AUGUST

- continue to **scout for weeds** and hand pull – weeds are easier to pull after a rain or deep watering
- **water wisely**

LATE AUGUST/ SEPTEMBER (best time to prepare lawn for a green spring)

- in August **scout** for chinch bug damage: see Chinch bug fact sheet
- **dethatch** and **aerate** if necessary – best done in high traffic areas
- apply 0.5 cm **compost** or apply **slow release organic fertilizer**
- **reseed** bare patches or **over seed** entire lawn with good grass mixture if it looks spindly
- if drought continues into fall **water wisely**, 1" (2 cm) of water per week (one full tuna can)

OCTOBER

- chop fallen leaves with mulching mower and leave ¼" (0.5 cm) as **mulch**, compost remainder
- hand pull weeds after a rain
- fertilize with a good **slow release fertilizer**
- minimize your lawn area by replacing it with ground covers, native species, shrubs and trees

NOVEMBER

- cut grass one last time at a height of 2" (5 cm), leave mulched leaves and grass clippings on lawn
- service lawnmower and sharpen blades
- plan to minimize salt damage next year by using bird seed or sand to deice

Definitions

Aerate: This will help loosen compacted soil, and allow water & nutrients to penetrate. Use a garden fork, rent a core aerator or contract a lawn care company to do this for you. Aeration is needed most in high traffic areas.

Compost: A soil fertilizer that provides organic material to the soil with beneficial microbes that help break down thatch and inhibit pests. Increasing the organic matter of soil with compost provides the lawn with its nutrients slowly and avoids pollution through excess runoff.

Dethatch: Thatch can become a problem by impeding water and nutrient movement if greater than ½" (1 cm). Thatch can harbour turf insects such as chinch bugs. You can use a rake, rent a machine or contract a lawn care company to do this for you in the autumn. Compost removed thatch.

Grass cycle: Leave grass clippings on lawn; a great fertilizer. It adds nitrogen and decreases the amount of fertilizer you need to apply.

Mow high: Place mower setting at a height of 2 ½" to 3" (8 cm), cut less than 1/3 of blade height each time. Longer grass blades moderates soil temperature, lessens moisture loss and crowds out weeds. It also provides more leaf surface, deeper roots and helps lawn recover from stress. Mow when turf is dry, mowing when grass is wet causes compaction and could spread disease.

Mulch: Using a mulching mower, fall leaves can be cut up very small and left on the lawn, adding nutrients to the soil.

Over seed with grass seed mixture: Turf with a mixture of grasses will tolerate insect, disease and drought more than a single variety (monoculture) lawn. It will create a lush thick lawn that helps crowd out weeds. A good time to over seed lawns is in the fall using a mix of perennial rye-grass and fine fescues. If this was not done last fall, top dress and reseed bare patches in spring.

Reseed: This is seeding bare patches with a mixture of grasses. It will decrease the chance of weeds occupying that space and will create a lush looking lawn.

Sharp mower blades: Tearing the grass with dull mower blades stresses the plant and encourages turf diseases.

Slow release fertilizer: Provide the lawn with nutrients slowly and avoids pollution through excess runoff with slow release fertilizers. The best time to fertilize is in the fall when grass builds roots.

Soil: Grasses generally prefer a minimum topsoil depth of 4 to 6 inches of rich sandy loam and at least 5% organic matter. Over time, this rich topsoil layer can be accomplished by topdressing with compost.

Test your soil: This will tell you pH and nutrients levels required for a healthy lawn so you can apply fertilizers correctly; a pH between 6.0 and 7.0 is best for healthy grass growth.

Top dress: with compost ¼" (0.5 cm), after top dressing you should be able to see the tops of the grass blades. This enriches the soil by adding organic matter, provides food for worms that will loosen and aerate the soil for air and water to penetrate and builds strong grass root systems.

Water wisely: Watering during summer heat and drought is not essential for turf health. In hot dry spells, allow grass to go dormant (turn brown) and don't cut until it recovers after a fall rain - a healthy lawn will recover. If you chose to water, water deep and seldom: a lawn only needs 1" (2 cm) of water per week to stay healthy. January 2006