



Do you wonder how to create and maintain beautiful lawns with minimal or no use of pesticides and fertilizers? Here are some tips and a natural lawn care calendar.



IMPROVING AND MAINTAINING YOUR LAWN SOIL

- *Testing.* Every few years have your lawn soil tested (*see Soil section*). The pH should be between 6 and 7.
- *Amendments (such as lime).* Be guided by your soil test, using only natural products in the amounts recommended. They are best applied in the fall.
- *Compost.* The most effective way to keep your lawn healthy is to apply ¼ inch of compost in spring and/or fall.
- *Compost tea.* During the growing season make compost tea and apply it every other month. Here's how to make it.
 - > Mesh bag (available online)
 - > High-quality compost and/or worm castings (available at garden centers)
 - > Plain bucket or compost-tea-making kit with aeratorPut the compost in the mesh bag and submerge it in water. Leave for 1-2 days; stir several times a day or use an aerator. Spray on lawn with a watering can or backpack sprayer.
- *Aerating.* Compaction is the number one enemy of turf grass, for compacted soil prevents roots from penetrating deep into the soil. In the fall, have the frequently used parts of your lawn aerated (landscapers on the island have the drum, which is attached to a lawn mower).

GRASS SEED. To most of us, all grass seed is pretty much the same. When we buy it we look on the box or bag to see if the seed is appropriate for shaded areas or sunny ones, and that's about it. However, we should pay more attention, for there are many kinds of grass seed and seed mixtures, and some produce lawns that are more resistant to weeds than others. Look for "cool season" seed that includes bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and fine fescues – a combination capable of withstanding various conditions throughout the year.

Consider buying a mix that includes white clover. Clover is often thought to be an undesirable weed, but it can be an ideal component within a blend of turf grasses. Drought tolerant, clover makes its own nitrogen, which is fixed in the soil and benefits nearby plants. The little white blossoms that come in June are loved by pollinators – and they are pretty! *See the Commercial Suppliers section for grass seed sources, p. 21.*

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OVERSEEDING. If you have bare spots or areas where the grass is sparse, they should be reseeded (over-seeded). Given the opportunity, grass plants out-compete most weeds. Rake away any dead grass and make sure the soil is not compacted. Add compost, sprinkle the seed in and work it into the compost, tamp all down with your feet, keep area consistently moist until the seed has germinated and the plants are a few inches high.

CORN GLUTEN. Corn gluten is a natural weed control and fertilizer (it adds a 10% charge of nitrogen) that prevents weed seeds from germinating. Apply it in the spring – ideally when the forsythia is blooming. It's important to remember that corn gluten prevents grass seed from germinating as well, so do not apply in areas that you are overseeding.

MOWING. Mow your grass often, with sharp blades. Grass height should be at least 3” throughout the growing season. The last cut of the year should be down to 2” to avoid fungal problems developing over the winter.

Leave your grass clippings on the lawn! Regular mowing keeps clippings short so that they very quickly decompose and fertilize lawn and soil.

WATERING. Avoid frequent, shallow watering. Well-established organic lawns are drought-tolerant and only require 1”-1.5” per week, including rainfall. Use a rain gauge or a small can to measure this amount.

GRUBS. *See the Pests and How to Treat them section, p. 19.*

LAWN SIZE. In order to cut down on maintenance and to provide space for planting native plants that will attract pollinators and birds, consider reducing the size of your lawn.

NATURAL LAWN CARE CALENDAR*

Early April	Rake up leaves and debris.
Mid April	When the lawn has greened up, rake up any dead grass.
Late April/early May	First mow, blade at 3.”
May	If you have had a soil test, apply amendments as per results. Overseed as necessary; keep areas moist. When forsythia blooms, apply corn gluten to areas that have not been overseeded. Top dress with ¼” compost or compost tea.
June	Weed by hand as necessary. Water as necessary.
July	Weed by hand as necessary. Water as necessary. Apply compost tea.
Late August	If you need a soil test, send samples to the Maine Soil Testing Service.
September	Limit watering. Lower mower blade to 2.” Aerate as necessary. Overseed with appropriate grass seed. Top dress with ¼” compost.
October	Remove all leaves and debris. Final mow.

** If you are treating for grubs, see the Pests and How to Treat Them section, p. 19.*