Leap Into Lawn Care

Even if you have never picked up a hoe or knelt to plant a new plant, look out your window and you will probably see the result of your very first gardening effort – your lawn.

For many Americans, the green carpet we call our lawn, is an integral and the largest part of our landscape. Lawn care absorbs a significant amount of time during the summer with weed control, fertilization and irrigation. Indeed, growing a healthy lawn isn’t as easy as it looks! Even if your yard is richly endowed with trees, plants, and shrubs, chances are you still have a patch of grass here or there that needs your TLC as well! Use our tips and suggestions to help you maximize the enjoyment of your lawn and minimize lawn care chores.

Don’t worry about walking on our grass; now is the time to leap into lawn care!

Natural Lawn Care

Ever notice how hospitals and nursing facilities all have a large expanse of green lawn? The reason is that green is a restful, non-stressful color that helps folks heal quicker. Each year consumers spend a ton of money on mega-tons of chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides to capture that restful green for their home lawn. However, reports indicate that chemicals, lawns, and family safety are not a good mix.

According to the United States Environmental Pollution Agency, 95% percent of lawn care chemicals are possible or probable carcinogens. Aside from the fact these agents endanger our families and pollute both ground and surface water supplies, they also kill the microbiological colonies that live in the soil and keep our lawns healthy.

Initiate a natural lawn care plan and in return your lawn will take care of you.

1. A 50 x 50 foot lawn produces enough oxygen to sustain a family of four.
2. Multiply that 2500 square feet by eight and you get the cooling effect of 70 tons of air conditioning, a miraculous figure considering that most home air conditioners are only three or four ton capacity.

The most basic principle of natural lawn care is to work from the ground up.

Your lawn needs at least six inches of good top soil (ten is better) to be at its best. You don’t have to dig up your lawn to achieve this goal. Start in the fall by top-dressing your lawn with one-third inch of finely ground compost fine enough so that it will fall in between the blades of grass. Use the flat side of a garden rake to level it.
Come spring, aerating your lawn gives circulation to roots and the tiny organisms that work to keep your grass healthy. The best type of aeration is the type that leaves those ugly plugs of grass scattered about your lawn. However, the plugs quickly decompose and further enrich your topsoil.

Aerate your lawn at least once a season using either a mechanical or a hand aeration tool, depending on the amount of exercise you want to get and the size of your lawn. Small lawns can even be aerated by walking over them (heel to toe) while wearing a pair of spiked shoes. Aside from breaking up soil clumps, aeration also provides moisture retention and improves air circulation.

Another action you can take in natural lawn care is to leave grass clippings in the grass. Mow high with a 2 ½ to 3 inch cut, but never cutting more than one-third of the blade. Short grass clippings quickly decay and enrich your soil with nitrogen and other nutrients.

Easily accomplish a final step in natural lawn care in the fall.

Reseeding weak and bare areas of your lawn gives seed the time to establish roots after weeds are dormant or dead. Set your mower about ½-inch lower to help you find spots that need reseeding. Till or spade those areas, work in some compost, and rake it level. Reseed with a premixed blend that includes seeds for sun, shade, and wear tolerance to balance the strengths and weaknesses of your lawn.

Besides resulting in a healthier, more luxurious lawn, fall reseeding gives your lawn an edge over weeds. In fact, those bare spots that low mowing uncovered were probably caused by weeds that either died or went dormant. Reseeding those spots in the fall gives new grass time to establish roots, making it fit competition for any weeds that rise in the spring.

Whether reseeding or not, don’t forget to water your lawn in the fall. As always, water deeply. One inch of water will soak down into your topsoil, encouraging roots to grow down to find it. If you’re using a sprinkling system, a good way to measure is to dig a small plastic cup into a low-traffic area of your lawn.

Lawn Weed Control

Lawn weed control can put you on edge. When your knees begin to get calloused and your fingers begin to blister under your gloves from pulling those weeds, remember that James Russell Lowell said, "A weed is no more than a flower in disguise." However, if that doesn't brighten your mood, it's time you developed a lawn weed-control plan.

The best defense against lawn weeds is to grow thick, healthy grass. Proper care of your grass is the best lawn weed control. One gardening myth tells us that the way to a healthy lawn is consistent use of weed killers and fertilizers. Don't believe it! The basis for any good garden, lawn or otherwise, is healthy soil. Healthy soil is full of earthworms, insects, and other microorganisms that weed killers and chemical fertilizers destroy.

Don’t over water. Healthy soil holds water, and remember-keeping your soil healthy is the best form of lawn weed control. Water your lawn deeply (about 1 inch) once a week for long, healthy roots. Too frequent watering encourages weed seed germination and keeps grass roots shallow.

Alternatively, too little water also keeps grass from growing healthy roots. Lawn clippings compress and become “thatch, which not only smothers new growth, but also keeps water from reaching the soil. So pick up your rake or if your lawn is large, consider a mulching mower (a great way to add nutrition to your soil) or a mower with a bag attachment. Some mowers even perform both functions! In fact, a good lawn mower is the best weeding tool you can buy for lawn weed control.
Mow High

Throughout the summer, keep your mower set high. Low mowing, or "scalping" your lawn, stresses grass growth and puts weeds in the spotlight, which is just what they need to grow. Most weeds like direct sunlight. Don't give it to them.

One reason weeds grow so easily is because they have an abundance of seeds. Mow them down before they flower, which prevents them from "going to seed". Remove scattered rosette weeds (like dandelions) with a small, hand-held trowel or weeding fork.

Liquid Lawn Fertilizer

Should you consider using liquid chemical fertilizers? We think that it depends.

If you're goal is to grow a healthy lawn, remember this: Healthy growing turf grasses stabilize soil, conserve water, and filter out air and water pollutants. However, when you apply a chemical-packed liquid lawn fertilizer you have just negated everything your grass can do for you naturally... and that's not smart lawn care.

If you're looking for a liquid lawn fertilizer, you'll find plenty of them chock full of chemicals, but if you're looking for an organic liquid lawn fertilizer, you may have more trouble finding one. The first hint as to "why" can be found in a statement from one web site that sells an organic liquid lawn fertilizer, “Liquid formulation provides immediate, observable results through foliar feeding “

Foliar feeding... that means feeding the blades.

Grass is, with no help, one of the most efficient nitrogen processors of all plants. Grass blades grow either from crowns, roots, or from stolons (runners that produces new plants from buds) depending on the type of grass. Your turf is sustained by nourishment it gets from its roots. Roots turn nutrients into carbohydrates and store them for future use. If you initiate a good lawn care program, feeding the soil instead of the turf, your grass gets all the nitrogen and other nutrients it needs, naturally.

Over fertilization disturbs natural biological routines. Since the grass plant has no storage capacity, your grass becomes dependant on your lawn care practices. If you fertilize and water enough, you'll have a beautiful green lawn... right up until the time you quit.

Actually, liquid lawns fertilizers or fertilizers of any kind are an unnecessary expense that makes your grass chemically dependant.

The cliché "beauty is only skin deep" could have been first coined to apply to a lawn. If you feed your grass and not the soil, your lawn will not establish the healthy root system it needs to resist drought, disease and invasion by pests or weeds. In addition, remember that when you spray your turf with a liquid lawn fertilizer, the next time you mow, you cut off one-third of your lawn care plan.
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In addition to being the trailblazer for Gardening-Guides.com, Hans is also a talented Internet businessman and owner of Net Research, Netherlands. Starting with just a few articles on Holland bulbs and tulips, Hans has not only used his Internet expertise to grow a virtual garden that holds dozens of cultivars, but he has also cultivated a team of talented writers that provides you with ever-fresh news and insights into every type of gardening you can imagine.

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