

Organic Lawn 101

A Fact Sheet from Toxic Free NC

You don't need a fancy lawn service or a pesticide arsenal to have a lush green lawn. In fact, spring and fall provide you with great windows of opportunity to give your lawn the care and feeding it takes to go organic. If you thought you couldn't have both a green lawn and a clean environment, hopefully this fact sheet will change your mind. Read on to learn the basic steps to a lush, organic lawn.

Follow this basic four-step formula to build a healthy, green lawn that you will enjoy all year – without the chemical cocktail. You can use these steps in the spring and the fall to convert a lawn-on-drugs to a lawn that's safe for kids, pets and the planet.

1. Mow High. Foster deep roots and shade out weeds by mowing your lawn high – 3 to 3.5 inches. Mow frequently, and make sure those mower blades are sharp!

2. Aerate. Aerating the soil reduces compaction, a major cause of weeds. Leave the corings behind after you aerate, and then apply fertilizer so that it can reach the root zone.

3. Fertilize Gently. Just after aeration is the best time to apply fertilizer – but go easy! Use an organic fertilizer like compost, and use it sparingly. Excess nitrogen and phosphorous run off into local waterways when it rains, causing major water quality problems. Getting a soil test first from your county cooperative extension office tells you exactly how much fertilizer you'll need.

4. Overseed. Overseed your lawn with an appropriate species (centipede and zoysia are strongly recommended for North Carolina's warm climate). This is a great way to start converting your lawn if you currently have a cool-season grass such as fescue.

Learn more about organic lawn care from the National Coalition for Pesticide-Free Lawns:
<http://www.beyondpesticides.org/pesticidefreelawns/index.htm>

Books on natural lawn care

Managing Healthy Sports Fields: A Guide to Using Organic Materials for Low-Maintenance and Chemical-Free Playing Fields. Sachs, 2004. Wiley Publishers.

Lawns (Rodale's Organic Gardening Basics). 2000. Rodale Press.

Lawns: Natural and Organic. Williamson, 2006. Lone Pine Publishing.

