



The chemicals often used to keep lawns green can actually weaken your lawn and harm the environment, and some have been associated with cancer or reproductive effects in children and pets.

*Follow these 10 Tips for a healthy, pesticide-free lawn:*

### **1. Read the label**

Before you purchase a lawn product, read the whole label. The label contains ingredient lists, safety and handling information, and instructions for use and disposal. If the product says it is a hazard to humans or the environment, it is best to avoid it.

### **2. Just say no to pesticides**

Caring for your lawn without synthetic chemicals is easy and doesn't have to be costly. You'll be pleased with the results, especially if you aren't in a big hurry to achieve that "golf course" look, or if you enjoy the pleasant naturalized color and texture variation that comes with a healthy mixture of plants.

### **3. Mow high**

Set your mower to 2"-3" This step alone is as effective as herbicides in eliminating most unwanted weed plants. Save time, money and landfill space by leaving the clippings on the lawn as fertilizer.

### **4. Water infrequently, but deeply**

You may not need to water at all. If you do, water 1 inch (in a rain gauge), no more than once per week. Water in the early morning only. This encourages deep grass roots, and discourages fungus and weed germination. Cut back further in August when drinking water may be in short supply and your turf grass can go dormant.

### **5. Feed your lawn only lightly**

Use organic compost or organic fertilizer. Do this only in spring or early fall, otherwise you'll be feeding your annual weeds.

#### ***For the lawn aficionados:***

If you want a deluxe lawn, here is a sampling of some of the more advanced techniques in organic lawn care.

### **6. Check your soil**

Take a shovel and dig down. If you have 6" or more of topsoil, you're in great shape. If you have less than 4", consider beginning a routine of adding ½" compost annually. It's hard to have a nice lawn without enough soil. Get a soil test. Send a sample of your soil to UMass Soil Testing Lab, 413-545-2311, [www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest](http://www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest). Follow their recommendations for soil amendments such as lime, organic matter, and fertilizer.

### **7. Save money by working only on problem areas**

For barespots, topdress with ½ inch of compost, then overseed in early spring. Overseed

thin areas again in fall. Use a mixture of grasses, including fescue. Aerate compacted areas.



Topdressing the lawn is the process of adding a fine layer of ‘home mixed quality soil’ to the lawn surface. Top dressing benefits the lawn as it builds up the quality of the soil over a period of time, - sandy soils will be able to retain moisture better and so the lawn will be more resistant to drought, clay soils will drain better thus improving root development. Another benefit of top dressing the lawn is that it will help to even out any lumps and bumps that are present on an uneven lawn, filling in any small hollows that may develop. Top dressing also stimulates the grass to produce new shoots and so results in denser grass cover which helps combat the onset of weed and moss infestation.

## **8. Eliminate grubs with nematodes**

Grub problems are rare in organic lawns, possibly due to high biological activity and plant diversity in the soil. However, if you do have an outbreak with damage (usually more than 10 grubs per square foot), you can kill grubs with beneficial nematodes. Follow directions carefully as these microscopic worms need to be kept cool and moist. The bacterium Milky Spore is an effective control of Japanese beetle grubs. Ask your local garden center or order by mail (e.g. [www.extremelygreen.com](http://www.extremelygreen.com); Fairfax Biological Lab 717-349-2789; [www.gardensalive.com](http://www.gardensalive.com)).

## 9. Know what feeds your weeds

Every weed tells a story about your soil. Crabgrass likes compact soil. Cinquefoil likes poor dry soil. Dandelions like high pH. Use your soil test as a guide to make conditions favorable to turf and unfavorable to weeds. Many plants you might consider weeds are beneficial to your lawn and useful to humans. For example, clover helps make nitrogen available in the soil, and plantain can be applied to the skin to soothe insect bites. And a diversity of species leads to lawns that are more hardy.

## 10. If you use a lawn service, ask for organic

A list of Northeast Organic Farming Association accredited organic landscapers is available at Organic Land Care, [www.organiclandcare.net](http://www.organiclandcare.net). As always, follow good business practices and check references before hiring any service professional. If your landscaper is not confident caring for your lawn organically, suggest they take a course for professionals. Check listings at [www.organiclandcare.net](http://www.organiclandcare.net)

*This information is provided as a public service from the Massachusetts Toxics Use Reduction Institute (TURI) at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. Established by the State's Toxics Use Reduction Act of 1989, TURI provides research, training, technical support, laboratory services and grant programs to reduce the use of toxic chemicals while enhancing the economic competitiveness of local businesses. Names of commercial web sites and private corporations are given for informational purposes only. TURI does not endorse nor recommend private organizations.*

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<http://www.lawnandmower.com/top-dressing-the-lawn.aspx>

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