

# LAWN CARE:

- ◆ **7 Steps to Seed a New Lawn**
- ◆ **10 Essential Tips for a Natural Lawn**



SKILLIN'S GREENHOUSES

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Hello again,

Following are some steps any of us can take to help ensure a good quality lawn as part of your home and garden.

We believe in natural solutions to lawn care as we do for all gardening. Natural solutions are best for our planet, our homes and our gardens.

Lawn care is relatively easy to do and does not cost a great deal of time and money. Let us go over some steps through the year that YOU CAN DO!

**\*Late March, early April—give your lawn a good vigorous raking.** As soon as the snow has retreated and your lawn is dry, rake the old debris, sand, twigs and other foreign matter off. This will help remove thatch and debris that might restrain grass growth as well as aerate the lawn. Air and light will also trigger lush growth. All of this helps to get your lawn greening and growing.

**\*Concerned about crabgrass? Had dandelion issues in the past? Apply corn gluten based natural fertilizers to your lawn when the forsythia is ablaze in yellow.** This often occurs in mid April. Corn gluten will work for a few weeks to smother weed seed that has wintered over between your blades of grass. Crabgrass and early dandelion seeds are some of the more well known weeds that germinate from seed. Not concerned about such weeds? Go to the next step!

**\*Apply zero phosphorus Espoma Lawn Food (18-0-3) to your lawn using a broadcast spreader.** This can be done in April if you do not apply corn gluten products as described above. If you do apply corn gluten then plan on applying the Espoma product in May. We recommend twice yearly applications of this product. This Lawn Food has many natural ingredients that if it is consistently applied twice per year the soil in your lawn will show good steady improvement each year. Better quality soil means the roots of your lawn will grow deeper and stronger. Roots that are "deeper and stronger" will help your lawn to much better survive our cold winters and dry summers. Stronger healthier lawns will also help crowd out weeds. In place of this product we often recommend Pro Gro by North Country Organics.

**\*Mow properly.** Recycling your grass clippings by leaving them on the lawn will provide a great deal of your lawn's nutrient needs for the season. Keep your mower blades sharp. In most cases, lawns should be mowed no lower than 2.5 inches and even higher in the summer. The last mowing or two of the season should be short as better air circulation in colder and wetter weather is a good thing.

**\*Summer weeds bugging you badly?** Let us help you with some good common sense solutions to your situation. In most cases weeds can be controlled sensibly and this does not have to take much time or money.

**\*Time for that second application of zero phosphorus Espoma Lawn Food (18-0-3) to your lawn using a broadcast spreader around Labor Day.** Some years the time really flies by and it has been Thanksgiving before I get that second application down. That is okay! To repeat: We recommend twice yearly applications of this product. (Again all natural Pro Gro 5-3-4 by North Country Organics can be substituted well) This Lawn Food has many natural ingredients that if consistently applied twice per year the soil in your lawn will show good steady improvement each year. Better quality soil means the roots of your lawn will grow deeper and stronger. Roots that are “deeper and stronger” will help your lawn to much better survive our cold winters and dry summers. Stronger healthier lawns will also help crowd out weeds.

Many experts advocate applying Corn Gluten for a second time around Labor Day as this time of year brings much weed seed. If you are greatly concerned about crabgrass and dandelions then Labor Day indeed is a good time to apply Corn Gluten. We then recommend your second application of Espoma Lawn Food later in September.

**\*Lawns do best with a neutral pH.** Most of our soils tend to be acidic. We do recommend you conduct a pH test of your lawn at least every other year. If lime is needed to “sweeten the soil” or raise the pH then we recommend a calcium based lime such as Fast Acting Lime by Encap. Let us help you with your soil test and the proper amount of lime. Again lime can be easily spread with a broadcast spreader.

**\*Grow the Right Grass!** We offer the Bonide grass seed series as a good balanced offering for northeastern lawns. More and more of us have tried and really like Bonide’s Heat and Drought Tall Fescue grass seed mix. ‘Heat and Drought’ contains 3 very hardy blends of Tall Fescue and has a rich green look. Tall Fescue roots grow very deep which means your lawn will look great with less water, show more insect and disease resistance, and endure the cold winter temperatures better.

I often **over seed parts of my lawn** that are getting a little thin. Overseeding can be done any time of the gardening year. This is easily accomplished by scratching the soil, laying the seed down, scratching the seed in and covering the seed with compressed paper pellets such as Grass Seed Accelerator or Penn Mulch. These pellets expand and provide a nice thin cover to the seed. Water daily and you will have thick grass soon!

Mike Skillin

Skillin’s Greenhouses

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# 7 STEPS To Seed A New Lawn

- STEP 1** Use a loam which is free from a lot of debris. Use a loam which has a good balanced texture, not very sandy or a lot of clay. If time permits get a soil test done. Spread the loam at a depth of 4". Maintain a grade for proper drainage. This is the rough grade.
- STEP 2** Spread lime over the rough grade at 50 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft., setting 9 on a drop spreader, 3 on a cyclone spreader. Next spread Winter Turf/Seed Starter Fertilizer over the rough grade, setting 6 on a drop spreader, 3 on a cyclone spreader. Rake the lime and fertilizer in the soil with an iron rake to a depth of 2" or so.
- STEP 3** With a grading rake or iron rake, put a finish grade on the soil, smoothing out all the hills and valleys.
- STEP 4** Select a seed that is recommended for the conditions of your lawn. Broadcast the seed over the area being sure that the correct coverage is used.
- STEP 5** Gently scratch in the seed with a rake. It is not necessary to completely cover the seed with soil.
- STEP 6** The most critical step is **WATER**. A newly seeded lawn must not dry out. The soil must remain moist at all times through the germination process. 1" of water a week is required by a new lawn.
- STEP 7** Mow the lawn when the first grass blades reach the height of 3".

## SOME OTHER TIPS:

- 1) Straw or other mulches are not needed in the spring or early fall. A mulch should be used if seeding in summer.
- 2) When selecting a seed consider:
  - Amount of light lawn will receive
  - How much traffic lawn will receive
  - Determine if the seed will make a high or low maintenance lawn
  - Determine coverage per pound of seed



# 10 Essential Tips for a Natural Lawn



## OUR MISSION

To create a broad-based coalition of non- and for-profit organizations committed to educating society about the benefits of organic lawn care and gardening, and affecting a quantum change in consumer and industry behavior.



For the most in depth lawn information, check out Paul Tukey's book, *The Organic Lawn Care Manual* wherever books are sold. For a signed copy, visit [www.safelawns.org](http://www.safelawns.org)

- 1. Obtain a Soil Test** — Never spend money on any fertilizer or soil amendment without first consulting the results of a soil test first. Make certain your soil is deep enough, preferably 6 inches.
- 2. Grow the Right Grass** — The most common lawn grasses in North America, Kentucky bluegrass and Bermudagrass, also need the most water and fertilizer to grow well. Other species such as perennial ryegrass, fescue, seashore paspalum and centipede grass may be better for your region of the country.
- 3. Water Well** — Morning watering is always recommended so that the surface of the lawn dries off during the day. Water deeply and infrequently so the roots of the grass learn to grow down into the soil to get the water they need.
- 4. Think of Your Soil as Alive** — "Dirt" is what you track into your house. The material that grows your lawn, the soil, is alive with organisms large and small. Nurturing that life through proper use of natural materials will lead to a successful natural lawn.
- 5. Mow Properly** — Recycling your grass clippings by leaving them on the lawn will provide approximately half of your lawn's fertilizer needs for the season. Keep your mower blades sharp. Depending on the species — Bermudagrass and seashore paspalum are the exceptions — lawns should be mowed no lower than 2.5 inches, even higher in the summer.
- 6. Avoid Synthetic Materials** — Fertilizers manufactured in a laboratory often burn lawn grasses and soils. Fertilizers and soil amendments should come from materials that were once living plants or animals, or mined minerals such as lime or sulfur.
- 7. Add Compost** — Nature's most magical soil additive, compost, contains all sorts of beneficial microorganisms that add life to the soil. These organisms will interact with the organic fertilizers to provide the green lawn many of us covet. Compost in liquid form, known as compost tea or extract, should be used in combination with dry compost because the liquid form is available to the soil and grass more quickly. This is especially important during the years of transition from a synthetic system.
- 8. See Weeds as Messengers** — Weeds usually appear on lawns only when something is wrong with the soil. Even if we kill the weeds, they will come back unless we fix the underlying problem within the soil.
- 9. Similarly, See Insects as Messengers** — A rush of new grass growth caused by synthetic fertilizers will often attract insects. Predatory insects are rarely a problem in a natural system that is in balance.
- 10. Overseed Regularly** — In nature, all plants produce seed to reproduce themselves. In a lawn system, where we mow regularly, grass is not allowed to reproduce and even the healthiest plants get tired. By overseeding in spring or fall, you are introducing robust young plants that will fill in bare areas and compete aggressively against weeds.

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