

REEMS CREEK NURSERY

Organic Lawn Care

A Garden Guide

Organic Lawns are safer for children, pets, birds, and other wildlife - and help keep our waterways cleaner.

Get Started

If your established lawn is in good shape - you can switch to maintaining it organically at any time. If your current lawn is weedy and in poor condition, it may be necessary to remove that lawn and start over.



Get a Soil Test

Ideal pH for lawns is 6.5-7. Look for nutrient deficiencies and the amount of organic matter in your soil currently (hopefully at least 5%). Soil tests are free for most of the year from NC Cooperative Extension. Follow their instructions. Find more info at: <http://www.ncagr.gov/agronomi/sthome.htm>

Core-Aerate your lawn

Aerate before applying any soil amendments. This will actually remove tiny cores of soil, reduce soil compaction, and allow you to add soil amendments to your soil. Good soil building is key to organic lawns. Improving soil takes time, heavily compacted clay soils may benefit from annual aeration.

Apply organic fertilizer, compost, and soil amendments

Read the product label. Many products contain non-organic ingredients. You want to use organic fertilizers (naturally slow-release) for disease and insect prevention. We suggest Harmony, Symphony, Plant-tone, or Espoma Organic Lawn Care fertilizers. During hot, dry summers, a spray of liquid fish fertilizer will help prevent brown-out (apply early or late in the day).

Compost is key! Compost provides a stable source of nutrients, beneficial organisms, and organic matter to your soil. Top-dress your lawn with ¼" of compost in spring and fall. We recommend Daddy Pete's Composted Cow Manure.

Mowing



Mow to 3" with sharp mower blades, using a mulching mower. Mowing your grass at 3" will help shade out weeds and protect against drought. Leave your clippings (use a mulching mower) on the lawn to provide up to 30% of the nitrogen your lawn needs. *Clippings do not cause thatch.*

About thatch – A little bit ($\frac{1}{2}$ ") is OK. Thatch is caused by over-fertilization, pesticide use, and faulty watering

practices. Heavy thatch indicates that your soil is deficient in microbial activity. Add compost to transform the thatch into soil-building organic matter.

Only mow when the grass is dry. Mowing when grass is wet is both physically dangerous for you, and can spread diseases around your lawn.

Reseeding

Re-Seed heavily in Fall. Reseed in September (not August!). Invest in quality seed for the sun/shade conditions in your yard. Ideally plant new lawns and over-seed in September. The next-best times would be through mid-October, or in March.

Dealing with weeds

Dense turf is your best herbicide. Hand-weed small areas and remove weeds when they are small and easy to remove. Re-seed bare spots heavily and remember that **mowing high** (3") will deter weeds through shading. Living with some weeds allows you to maintain a safe, chemical-free lawn.

Corn Gluten

May provide some pre-emergent protection against weeds, and provides some fertilization as well. Crabgrass sprouts when forsythia is blooming. Apply corn gluten prior to forsythia blooming. *Never apply corn gluten when you are re-seeding.*

Water Properly

Spring-seeded lawns will require water weekly. Established lawns are more drought tolerant, and grass naturally goes semi-dormant in August to rest. It will green back up in fall. The general rule for watering: Water once weekly **in early a.m.** for about 3-4 hours or the depth of a tuna fish can. Your particular conditions such as soil health, sun/shade must be taken into consideration.

Disease and insect problems

These indicate soil issues or stress issues. **Use of pesticides will take you back to square one, as they will kill all your beneficial soil microbes, beneficial insects, and birds that eat insects.** Apply Milky Spore to address grubs in the ground (available at the nursery). You can order beneficial nematodes from places like Gardens Alive. Strive to prevent disease issues by watering early in the morning, so that the grass is dry by evening.

According the Audubon Society:

“In a recent study of pesticide exposure among children living in a major U.S. metropolitan area, traces of garden chemicals were found in 99% of the 110 children tested.

Remember, because children and pets have smaller body sizes, a tendency to play and roll on the ground, and frequently put in their mouths things that they find, they have a greater risk of exposure to applied pesticides than adult humans.

It is estimated that seven million birds die each year because of exposure to lawn pesticides... Pesticide use is rampant in this country – homeowners apply an estimated 78 million pounds of insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides per year to their homes, lawns, and gardens.”

Right grass for the right place

Here in the mountains of North Carolina, **cool-season grasses** perform best. Consider grass types seriously, it can mean the difference between a healthy, beautiful, low-maintenance lawn vs one that is not.

Grass Type	Shade	Heat	Cold	Drought
KY Bluegrass	G	F	VG	G
KY Bluegrass / Fine Fescue	G	F	VG	G
KY Bluegrass / Tall Fescue	G	G	VG	VG
KY Bluegrass / Tall Fescue / Fine Fescue	VG	G	VG	VG
KY Bluegrass / Perennial Ryegrass	G	F	VG	G
Creeping Love Grass (used for erosion control / steep slopes)	F	VG	G	G
Tall Fescue	G	G	VG	VG
Red Fescue (WNC Native)	VG	G	VG	G

VG = Very good, G = good, F = Fair

Organic Lawn Care – Month by Month Seasonal Schedule

February

- Fertilize cool season lawns with a slow-release organic fertilizer such as Harmony, Symphony, or Plant-tone.
- Pull broadleaf weeds while small.
- Sharpen mower blades; it is important to keep mower blades sharp all season.

March

- If not done in Feb. and only thru March 10 – Fertilize cool season lawns with a slow-release organic fertilizer.
- Pull broadleaf weeds while small.
- Mow any leaves remaining on lawn with **mulching** mower and leave on lawn.
- Mow grass to 3" with **mulching** mower when grass resumes growth.
- Seed new lawns or overseed now (September is better if you can wait).
- Corn gluten may be applied for pre-emergent weed control when forsythias start blooming, but not later.

Spring - April and May

- Mow with a mulching mower to 3" as needed, never cut more than 1/3 of the blade at one time.
- Hand-pull weeds as needed.
- Core aerate if thatch is excessive or if the soil is compacted.
- Spring-seeded lawns require one inch of water weekly.

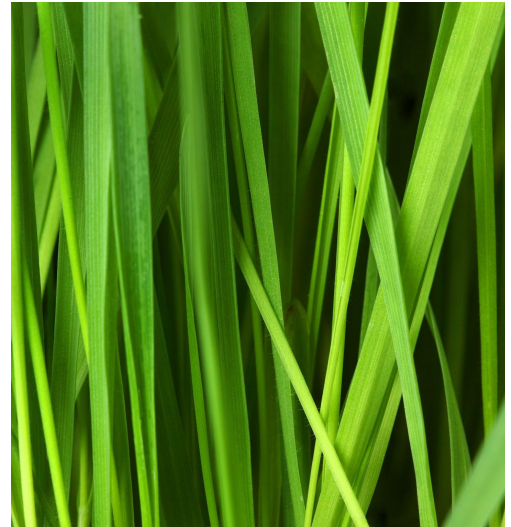
June and July

- Avoid mowing grass when wet.
- Mow with mulching mower to 3" as needed, avoid letting grass get taller than 4 ½" tall.
- It is better to mow wet grass with sharp blades - than to let grass grow too tall.
- Hand-pull weeds or spot treat as needed.
- If irrigating, lawn needs 1" of water per week.
- If you are letting your lawn go dormant, water 1" every 3 weeks.
- Monitor for insects in early summer.

August

- Hand-pull weeds as needed.

- Irrigate 1" of water per week, as needed.
- Mow with mulching mower to 3" as needed, avoid letting grass get taller than 4 ½" tall.
- Monitor for insects.



September

- Mow with mulching mower to 3" as needed, avoid letting grass get taller than 4 ½" tall.
- Irrigate 1" of water per week, as needed.
- **Seed/overseed** grass in September, do NOT seed in August.
- Core-aerate cool season grasses if soil is compacted.
- Rake in quality compost after core-aerating.
- Fertilize September-November with slow-release organic fertilizer such as Harmony, Symphony, Espoma's Organic All Season Lawn Food or Plant-Tone.
- Corn gluten application (only if NO seeding work is being done in the lawn).

October

- Mow with mulching mower to 3" as needed, avoid letting grass get taller than 4 ½" tall.
- If not done in September, fertilize with slow-release organic fertilizer.
- Hand-pull weeds as needed.
- Irrigate 1" of water per week, as needed.
- Chop up fallen leaves with mulching mower and leave on lawn (adds organic matter to soil).
- Apply lime if needed (free soil test through NC Cooperative Extension).

November

- Continue to mow with mulching mower to 3" as long as the grass is growing.
- Do final mow of 3".
- Chop up fallen leaves with mulching mower as a soil amendment and leave on lawn.
- Fertilize with slow-release organic fertilizer in November such as Harmony, Symphony, or Plant-tone.

"An organic lawn can provide all of the benefits of a healthy lawn without the use of synthetic chemicals." - North Carolina State University



Sources

<http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/organic-lawn-care-a-guide-to-organic-lawn-maintenance-and-pest-management>

<http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2708&q=382644>

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/4000/4031.html#calendar>



Start Your Organic Lawn! Reems Creek Nursery Garden Center has all the supplies you need to get your organic lawn going. Come see us! Version 2.1, Sept 22



76 Monticello Road Weaverville, NC 28787 828-645-3937 <https://reemscreek.com/>