

Simple Steps Towards Organic Lawn Care

Yearly Schedule

FIRST STEPS: EARLY MARCH - END APRIL

* *ASSESS YOUR LAWN - ITS NEEDS/YOUR NEEDS*

- Sharpen Mower Blades
- Soil Test
- Clean-Up (Power Rake/Aerate)
- Soil Amendments *after* Test Results
- Organic Fertilizer
- Re-Seed or Corn Gluten
- Top Dress with Compost
- First Mowing at 2 inches

SECOND STEPS: APRIL-JUNE

- Raise Mower Height for Subsequent Cuts
(3-3.5 inches)
- Use Proper Mowing Techniques
- Continue to Sharpen Blades
- Scout for Weeds
- Mechanical Weed Control
- Continue Re-seeding Bare Spots
- Monitor for Insect Problems

THIRD STEPS: JUNE-AUGUST

- Understand Natural Summer Stresses/Dormancy
- One Time Application Milky Spore
- Continue to Monitor for Insects/
Disease Problems
- Apply Beneficial Nematodes (if Necessary)

* *Do this at the beginning of each step.*

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Possible Liquid Fish Emulsion Application
Possible Topdressing with Rock Minerals
Continue to Mow High /Sharpen Blades
Leave Clippings on Lawn
Water Properly - if You Must

FOURTH STEPS: MID-AUGUST TO MID- SEPTEMBER

Soil Test (if Not Done in Spring)
Aerate (if Not Done in Spring & Necessary)
Best Time to Lime (if Necessary)
Best Time to Fertilize (if Necessary)
Best Time for Seeding or Re-Seeding
Top Dress with Compost (if Necessary)

FIFTH STEPS: OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER

Continue to Mow While Grass Grows
Final Mow - Reduce Height to 2 inches
For New Lawns or Lawns Over-Seeded in Early
Fall, Apply Organic Fertilizer at 1/2 rate
Remove Leaves as They Accumulate
or Use Mulching Mower and
Leave on Lawn

A Living Lawn...

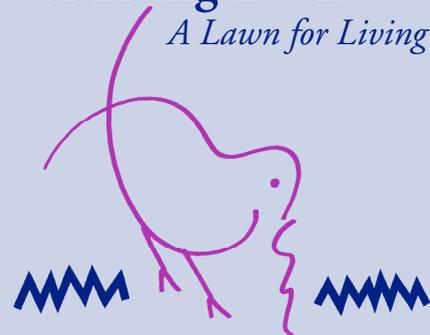
A Lawn for Living



a Public Service of MPAC
Marblehead Pesticide Awareness Committee
781-631-7214

A Living Lawn...

A Lawn for Living



VISIT MARBLEHEAD'S ORGANIC LAWN & GARDEN DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

At the end of Everett Paine Boulevard
off Route 114 in Marblehead.

A Partnership Project of MPAC,
Town of Marblehead, Board of Health
Recreation, Parks & Forestry Department
Marblehead Environmental Coalition

Partially-funded by Toxics Use Reduction
Institute (TURI) at UMass, Lowell
and the New England Grassroots
Environmental Fund

SATURDAY SEMINARS
are offered at the *"Living Lawn"*
Spring, Summer and Fall on
**SIMPLE STEPS TOWARDS ORGANIC
LAWN CARE.**

**CHOOSE
NOT TO USE
PESTICIDES.**

Join the movement to keep our
community healthy and pesticide-free.

Find out more through the *MPAC's*
"Awareness through Education" campaign.
Call 781-631-7214
for more information.

*Work with Nature,
not against it....*
That is the simplest step
towards a healthy and
beautiful lawn.

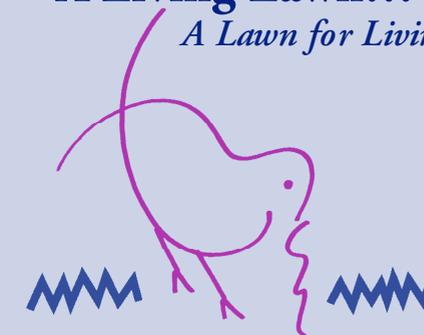
MARBLEHEAD PESTICIDE AWARENESS COMMITTEE
4 SEWALL STREET
MARBLEHEAD, MA
01945

Simple Steps Towards A Healthy Lawn

The Organic Way

A Living Lawn...

A Lawn for Living



A public service of
MPAC
Marblehead Pesticide Awareness
Committee
4 Sewall Street
Marblehead, MA 01945
(781) 631-7214
www.livinglawn.org

The goal throughout the Simple Steps process is to create a microbe and nutrient-rich soil system in which to develop deep-rooted, dense turf that competes successfully with weeds, and is low-maintenance, drought, insect and disease tolerant – and beautiful!

SOIL TESTING helps you begin a "soil care" program – the healthy grass will follow! Available from UMass, Amherst (413-545-2311 or www.umass.edu/plsoils/soiltest). Request recommendations for organic lawn care and the percentage of Organic Matter in the sample. It should be at least 5% - preferably higher. *Ideal pH for lawns is in the 6.5-7.0 range.* Send in your sample overnight express for most accurate results.

AERATE YOUR LAWN if it hasn't been done for several seasons and the soil is hard, dry and compact. *Aerate prior to applying any soil amendments.* Manual reel-type aerators are effective for small lawns; power aerators can be rented for larger lawns.

APPLY ORGANIC FERTILIZER and other soil amendments (following soil test recommendations) in spring and fall for slow-release nutrients that will help to build healthy roots and a "green-up" that will last over a longer period of time. *Beware of "organic" claims. Read the label!* Avoid non-natural ingredients like super-phosphate, harmful "natural ingredients" (like "natural nitrite of soda", which causes

salt build-up) and sewage sludge/biosolids (which may contain harmful contaminants). In hot, dry summer weather, lawns can be sprayed with a liquid fish emulsion to prevent summer brown-out.

COMPOST is key to organic lawn care. It provides a stable source of nutrients, beneficial organisms and organic matter for your lawn. *It acts as a "soil guardian".* Top-dress with 1/4 inch, preferably in spring and fall. Broadcast with a shovel or use a spreader open to widest setting. For small lawns, a garden sieve works well. Compost is sold in many different forms, including liquid. Or make your own. *If you use municipal compost, check that it has a "clean bill of health".*

MOW HIGH WITH SHARP MOWER BLADES. Think "lush" instead of "scalped"! *Keep your grass high to shade out weeds and protect against drought.* First spring mowing should be at 2 inches to remove any winter fungus. Subsequent mowings for the rest of the season should be at 3–3.5 inches. Last fall mowing return height to 2 inches. *Avoid cutting off more than one inch of grass blade at a time* – your grass should still look green after you have mown. If you don't "do-it-yourself", tell your landscaper how you want your lawn mown.

LEAVE YOUR LAWN CLIPPINGS ON THE LAWN for a free, natural nitrogen-fix your grass will appreciate. *Clippings do not cause thatch.*

THATCH is a build-up of dead grass roots, stems and leaves caused by faulty watering practices, excessive fertilizing and pesticides.

A bit of thatch is OK. Test by sticking a finger down between the grass blades – you may push through a thin layer of tangled root stolons, but then touch soil. If you cannot feel the soil, there is probably too much thatch. *Heavy thatch indicates soil deficient in microbial life.* Add compost (or a liquid de-thatch product) to turn thatch into soil-building organic matter.

RE-SEED HEAVILY. Early fall is the best time to re-seed/renovate a lawn. Invest in a good mix of seed. *Look for endophytic varieties,* which provide natural protection against some insects and fungal diseases.

WEEDS in turf are indicators of poor soil conditions and faulty watering/mowing/fertilizing. Grass itself is one of the most aggressive plants there is. *Dense turf is the best "herbicide".* It will take over and choke out your weeds once you have nurtured the soil it grows in. Determine your "weed tolerance". Then hand-weed small areas or "solarize" larger areas (smother them under black plastic at end of summer) – then re-seed heavily to let grass get the upper hand. *There is no such thing as a weed-free lawn.* Some "weeds" (dandelions, clover) are actually beneficial to your lawn, enhancing the availability of necessary nutrients. Some weeds are actually misplaced ground-covers (ajuga). But you'll hardly notice the few weeds that survive in a dense organic lawn that you keep mown high.

CORN GLUTEN products provide natural, non-toxic pre-emergent weed control. Apply in early spring or fall. *Do not apply at the same time as grass seed.*

WATER YOUR LAWN PROPERLY – and only when needed. Your lawn's water needs are site specific, influenced by soil type/drainage/sun/shade. *The goal of an organic lawn is to let Nature provide the lawn's water needs.* Established organic lawns, with dense turf and deep roots, are drought tolerant. And remember, grass naturally goes dormant in late August. A slightly brown lawn at end of summer is resting and will green up again in the cooler fall weather. If you must water, a general rule (depending on the amount of rainfall) is one time weekly for 3-4 hours to a depth of 2 inches (one full tuna can!). *Early a.m. is the best time to water.* If you have an in-ground irrigation system, make sure it has a rain gauge on it.

DISEASE AND INSECT PROBLEMS are symptoms of soil problems and/or turf stresses that need to be addressed. If you have a problem, work on your soil's health and improve your lawn care techniques by following the Simple Steps program. *It has been estimated that 90-95% of INSECT CONTROL is done by naturally occurring organisms (above and below ground) that are part of a healthy ecosystem.* Pesticides disrupt this system, killing microbial life, beneficial insects and birds that work to keep disease and insect problems in check. Use BENEFICIAL NEMATODES for grubs, chinch bugs, and sod webworms. MILKY SPORE POWDER (a species specific bacteria) can also be applied in a grid pattern on the lawn for effective and long-lasting grub control. Both of these need to be applied during the warm months.