

Best Practices for Organic Turfgrass Management

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Site Conditions

Turfgrass will do famously with 6" of sandy loam topsoil, good surface drainage, neutral pH, morning sun and adequate moisture. In the golf business we say, "1" of rain every Wednesday night fifteen minutes after dark!" Unfortunately in most home lawn situations ideal conditions are not always the case.

Start with a base of sound cultural practices

Mowing

- Return clippings whenever possible
- Mow at 2 ½" and remove only 1/3rd of the plant
- Ensure mower blades are always sharp
- Mulch leaves when possible * Sugar maple leaves have proven efficacy for control of broadleaf weeds

Fertilization

- Use soil tests to determine nutrient requirements but take the results "with a grain of salt"
- A solid rule of thumb for a home lawn would be to fertilize two to three times , (end of May, July and end of August), using a balanced fertilizer
- Avoid fertilization during periods of stress

Irrigation

- If you have control of this certainly a "deep and infrequent" approach is best

Aeration

- Aerate at least once a year and possibly more in high traffic areas
- Always accompany with overseeding

Overseeding

- Probably one of the most important and least expensive keys to successful turfgrass management!!
- Start with frost seeding and continue throughout the growing season
- You will be almost guaranteed to achieve an excellent stand of grass when you overseed with 4 to 6lbs of seed per 1000sq.ft.

- Seed blends will work fine but Perennial Ryegrass should always be there!

Problems and Challenges

Broadleaf Weeds

Weeds represent probably the biggest challenge and the best defense against weed infestation is a vigorous stand of grass. Weeds are opportunistic waiting for openings in the turf – openings within the stand of grass or exposed topsoil. By using the cultural practices plan listed above, (regular mowing, returning clippings, mulching leaves, aeration, conservative fertilization, careful irrigation and OVERSEEDING), you will virtually eliminate openings in the turf canopy.

There are alternative products available now for **selective** control (24D alternative) of broadleaf weeds. **Weed be Gone** is an effective control for many broadleaf weeds. It is a concentrated liquid iron.

Corn Gluten Pre emergent Herbicide also has some proven efficacy.

For **non selective** control (Roundup alternative) I have used both **Hort Vinegar** (acetic acid) or alternatively **Finalsan** (ammoniated soap of fatty acid).

Insects

White grubs are the most common insect pest to home laws in Ontario. The larvae are feeding on the root system of the plant. If a large enough population exists and the turf is already under other environmental distress such as drought or heat stress, turf damage and death can occur. There is a quick and easy solution to this problem – **Perennial Ryegrass**.

White grub damage often becomes apparent when we see the lawn “rolled up” or rotatiled by skunks or raccoons feasting on the grubs. Look at this as a positive thing. They have pointed out your weak turf and have even done some seed bed prep for you. By overseeding with perennial ryegrass you will solve this problem. The ryegrass seed has an endophyte with it which makes the plant undesirable to the grubs and other insects. As a bonus the plant will demonstrate better drought resistance and will germinate with just a few days!

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