

SERVICE DETAILS

# ORGANIC LAWN MANAGEMENT



The principals of organic lawn management can be defined as a systems approach.

It's more than just a product driven program and has become the standard in conventional turfgrass management.

We consider more than just feeding the grass, it all begins with the soil.

If you create a healthy soil it will sustain a healthy lawn with less inputs needed.

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## SOIL TESTING

Our program begins with a soil test, which will give us enough information to customize a plan that meets the needs of the soil. Soil amendments are used to maintain the appropriate nutrient levels and correct PH balance in the soil. Many New Englanders will apply limestone every year without testing the soil to determine if it is needed. It is also important to know how much to apply and what type, calcium or magnesium. We can determine the appropriate inputs by interpreting the results of a soil test.

\*As your test results come back our team of turf managers will analyze and send you optimal add-ons to improve your soil.



## FERTILIZER APPLICATIONS

Cool season turfgrass requires more inputs than nature can provide, which is why we supplement with organic slow release fertilizers. We custom blend our fertilizers with the proper nutrients, but also include microbial and beneficial organisms, which are necessary to maintain a healthy soil life. We may apply a granular or a liquid to the lawn, depending on the needs of the soil and the time of season we are in. Organic fertilizers break down with an active soil biology, it is not dependent on water like in a conventional program.



## CULTURAL PRACTICES

Cultural practices are extremely important to an organic program, this is a major part of the systems approach. Proper mowing and watering can make all the difference. We will make recommendations and/or work with your maintenance service so we all have an understanding of the program.



## IRRIGATION FOR ESTABLISHED LAWNS

### Deeper less frequent watering

Shallow frequent watering encourages thatch and weeds. The object is to get the grass roots to grow deep. Roots will grow deep only if water is available deep in the soil. This is why less frequent but deep watering is better. The surface soil dries out but the deep soil remains moist, encouraging the roots to grow deeper. Water will penetrate deeper if you water about ½ inch, wait two or three hours and then water one inch.

### Water early morning (between 4-10am)

The best time to water is early morning. This allows the grass and soil surface to dry off throughout the day. Watering in the evening may promote fungal diseases, which are often related to excess moisture.

### Avoid over watering

The amount of water your lawn needs depends on the type of grass/soil, sun exposure, and rainfall amount. A simple way to determine how much water the lawn is getting, place a few empty tuna cans on the lawn during a watering. Adding organic matter to the soil (compost top dress) will increase the soils ability to hold water, requiring less irrigation over time. Check for puddles on the grass surface or excessive runoff on driveways or walkways. Timers can be helpful and are found at most home centers.

## IRRIGATION FOR NEW LAWNS

### Keep moist with frequent short waterings

The goal for seed germination is to keep the soil moist. If puddles occur on the soil surface, it will move the seed around or cause it runoff. It is best to water a newly seeded lawn by hand until the seed has germinated and has established a root system. Contact office to help with irrigation system timing.



## MOWING

### Sharp blades

We need to take mowing a bit more seriously if we want to keep our organic lawn healthy. Mowing is a stress producing process for the lawn, but we can minimize that stress with a few simple techniques. Start with a sharp mower blade. A dull blade will rip the grass leaving it wounded and open to disease. Avoid removing more than one third of the leaf at each cutting. A more severe cut will produce additional stress from which the plant must recover.

### Mulch cut (recycle clippings)

Always try and leave grass clippings on the lawn, they will breakdown and provide a good source of nitrogen for the soil. There are a few exceptions when it may be necessary to bag the clippings: the first mow of the year, to remove winter debris. When the lawn is overgrown and the clippings could smother the lawn or to help remove weed seeds.

### Raise height of cut

In order to produce thick, dense grass and get a deep root system, raise the height of cut to 3 to 3-1/2 inches. There are four direct benefits that we get from longer height of cut. The taller leaf shades the soil surface and keeps weed seed from germinating. It also cools the soil surface during summer stress periods. It is effective at out competing weeds. And most importantly, longer leaf length aids photosynthesis (more blade surface exposed to the sun). If your lawn will be used for entertaining or if there is a big weekend of sports planned for the lawn, then of course mowing the lawn shorter would be appropriate. If you are mowing the lawn down more than a few inches, try and do it in increments.

For example: mow once, then lower the mowing height and mow again in a different direction.

Always try to alternate mowing patterns where possible





## CORE AERATION

The best way to sustain a healthy lawn is to develop a deep root system. Encouraging deep roots will help the plant resist drought stress, fight pest/weed pressure and have a deeper green color. Soil can become compacted due to foot traffic, over watering, and just general conditions throughout the season. By coring soil plugs out of the lawn, we are allowing air, water, and nutrients deeper in the soil. This will help to alleviate compaction and build soil health by encouraging a deep root system.

While we have these 2-3 inch holes in the lawn and soil plugs on the surface, it is a great time to establish seed. These core plugs dissolve and the holes will close up and create a great seed bed for germination.



COMPACTED SOIL,  
SHALLOW WEAK GRASS ROOT



WATER, AIR, AND  
NUTRIENTS ENTER THE SOIL



NEW, DEEPER ROOTS MEANS  
INCREASED LAWN DENSITY



## TOP DRESSING WITH COMPOST

One of the most beneficial things you can do for your lawn is top dress with compost. This is especially helpful when we are transitioning a lawn from a conventional program. We use a high quality finished compost that is screened and tested. This helps to enhance the soil quality in many ways:

- ✔ Increase organic matter
- ✔ Add beneficial organisms/increase microbial activity
- ✔ Aid in water retention at the roots
- ✔ Alleviate compaction in the soil
- ✔ Provide a seed bed for fast germination when overseeding

We apply approximately ¼ inch of compost over the existing lawn, which breaks down into the soil 3-5 days. You will still see the existing lawn and you may find a few larger chunks of material, but it is normal and you will be amazed how fast it breaks down and disappears.



## MANAGING CRABGRASS

Our biggest enemy in the pursuit of a healthy organic lawn (in full sun) is crabgrass. It shows up in summer almost out of the blue when the weather is hot and dry. To control the problem it is better to be proactive. We seed in spring/fall to create turf density, maintaining a higher mow height during growing months to shade soil surfaces, and proper watering to reduce stress to the established lawn.

### **Establish a dense lawn and keep it hardy during the growing season**

Since crabgrass seed needs sunlight, keep the length of grass as high as possible to shade the soil surface. Try and minimize thin areas of the lawn by adding fast germinating grass seed like perennial ryegrass. Crabgrass is an annual weed, so it will begin to die off at the end of the summer and that is the best time to replace the voided areas with high quality grass seed. We recommend core aeration followed by a heavy over-seed with a quality blend of grass seed suited for your conditions.

### **Top dressing with high-quality compost**

Not only will it provide all the long-term benefits to the soil, but it will cover the crabgrass seed and not allow it the sunlight it needs to germinate. Apply ¼ inch of screened finished compost to the lawn in early spring and apply grass seed at the same time.

On some extreme cases we will recommend "starting over" depending on the size of the lawn and the budget involved. If the lawn is dominated by crabgrass, wait until late summer to prep the area and install sod. On occasion it may make sense to gain control with an herbicide application. The most sensible approach would be a pre-emergent application in the spring, which will prevent the seed from germinating. Keep in mind that it will inhibit any seed from germinating, so you will not be able to establish grass seed in the spring.

### **Organic Pre-Emergent**

We continue working with distributors to find an organic approach to help decrease crabgrass populations. They are available now and will help decrease populations between 40 to 50% yearly. Overtime Lawns will have less crabgrass but due to the seed production we can't guarantee 100% control.

### **A few things to note about crabgrass.**

- It only thrives in full sun
- It's an annual weed, which means it grows by seed
- It does well in heat and compaction (driveway/sidewalk edges)
- A single seed stalk can produce thousands of seeds

pure solutions

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