

Organic Lawn Care Program



ROGER S. BOLGER
HORTICULTURALIST
WWW.ROGERBOLGER.COM

Organic lawn care is not simply replacing synthetic products with organic products. Organic lawn care relies on proper turf care practices and maintaining active, living soil. Organic lawn care will produce healthy turf grass without hazards to children, pets, and wildlife, but it should not be held to the artificially high, picture-perfect standard set by chemically-treated lawns. While it is possible to have an impeccable lawn without chemicals, it requires a good deal of labor and applied knowledge. Luckily a lawn can be healthy without a perfect appearance, so tolerance for a few weeds will ease your back without hurting the turf. For specific product recommendations, email me at Roger@RogerBolger.com.

Soil is the basis of plant success. Turf grass needs at least four to six inches of good topsoil to grow well, and twelve inches is ideal. Amend heavy clay soil by having it core aerated, and then rake out the clay plugs and top dress with ¼-inch of compost. This will allow better drainage and penetration of nutrients, break down thatch, and feed the beneficial organisms that keep the soil and grass plants healthy. Overseed after topdressing if the turf is thin.

Fertilize regularly with an organic lawn fertilizer high in nitrogen. Give a full dose of fertilizer in spring and fall when lawns are growing rapidly; apply half as much in the heat of summer. Leave grass clippings on the lawn when mowing as the clippings recycle nutrients without adding to thatch. Consider overseeding with white clover, which fixes atmospheric nitrogen in the soil and helps feed the lawn.

Mow at the highest wheel setting (3 inches) during the summer, and gradually lower it near the last mowing of the season. Taller grass shades out weeds, keeps the soil moist, and encourages rhizome production and thicker turf. Mow often enough so that no more than ⅓ of the grass blade is removed. Keep the blade sharp and leave clippings on the lawn.

Water infrequently, but deeply, to encourage turf roots to grow deep. Most weed roots extend no more than 3 inches into the soil, so deep, infrequent watering discourages them. Wait until the soil is dry 6 inches down, and then apply one inch of water. If the soil is very dry, apply ½-inch of water, wait 90 minutes, then water another ½-inch. Moist soil absorbs water better, just as a moist sponge absorbs faster than a dry sponge.

Weeds are best pulled by hand. Spot treat weeds with 20% vinegar (labeled for herbicide use). Apply corn gluten as your spring fertilizer before forsythia blooms in April to reduce sprouting of weed seeds, especially crabgrass seeds. White clover is not a weed – it feeds the turf and was part of all lawn seed mixes until the widespread promotion of herbicides after World War II.

Insects and fungal diseases are not generally problematic unless the lawn is receiving improper care. Return to good care practices and take a sample of the turf to a local garden center. A knowledgeable expert can diagnose the problem and recommend an organic solution until proper care has restored nature's balance.