



Lawn Maintenance



July 2000

So you have a beautiful, healthy, relatively pest free, vigorously growing lawn and you want to keep it that way. The best way to do that is through cultural practices, such as proper mowing, watering, fertilizing, aerating, raking, and topdressing. Keeping in touch with your lawn alerts you to any possible pest action long before it can become a problem.

Mowing

When mowing, as with all plant trimming, always follow the 1/3 rule: never cut more than one third of the plant's productive material, i.e., the grass blade, to leave it sufficient resources to repair itself and grow. The ideal height for mowing changes a bit with the seasons. In the early spring, it is best to mow your grass fairly short the first few times because there is less productive (green) material. Later, when the temperature rises and your grass is growing well, cut it a bit higher (5–8 cm). This will help keep the lawn healthy because it will develop a deep, extensive root system, the grass will grow thicker and thereby reduce competition from weeds, ample leaf material will remain for photosynthesis, and soil moisture will be retained. Longer, thicker grass also prevents beetles from laying the eggs



that become white grubs in your lawn, since they prefer thin grass for this.

Cut your grass when it's dry. Also, sharpen your mower blade in the spring and keep it sharp — your grass can repair itself more quickly and easily when there is only one clean cut and not many tears. Grass can be cut repeatedly because the new material grows from the base of the plant and not from the ends of the shoots.

Leaving the lawn clippings on your lawn after mowing provides a great source of slowly-released nitrogen for the grass and humus for the soil. While a thick layer of clippings (more than 1/2 cm) can become a thatch problem, you should have no problem if you follow good cultural practices.

Fertilizing and Watering

Knowing your site and grass will help you determine what fertilizer to use and when. Commercial fertilizers contain three important nutrients for your lawn, nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K), in some combination, for example, N-P-K 20:20:20. Nitrogen helps your grass grow and makes it dark green, phosphorus helps the roots grow, and potassium is essential for stress resistance. Compost is also a great fertilizer mixed into soil before seeding or laying sod, or raked over the lawn.

Most lawns do best if watered deeply (put a container on your lawn and stop when about 2 cm of water has collected in it) and infrequently (about once a week). While your lawn will recover from the drought in the heat of the summer if you don't water it and quickly become green again with rain or watering, the stress can leave it less resistant to insects and disease.



Seeding or Replacing Sod

Bare patches are a real eyesore! Sometimes your grass will disappear in areas even with your best efforts, such as when you've removed large weed clumps in a spot. When reseeding a bare area, follow the directions for your seed type and site, and overseed. To replace a piece of sod, cut out the dead or damaged area to about 2 cm deep, rake the soil, and add some fertilizer to it, then put the new piece of sod in, stepping on it or rolling it. With either method, water the area well.

Aerating

Aerating your lawn does wonders for it. Not only does it allow a better flow of water, air, and other vital nutrients to the plants, but it lets roots grow more easily through the soil. Mechanical aerators are available, as are sandals and shoes with spikes on them.

Dethatching

Thatch is a tough mixture of dead grass and roots that accumulates at the soil surface. It prevents the easy flow of water, air, and nutrients to your grass and also provides a great environment for harmful insects to flourish. To deal with thatch, rake it off (you may need to use a power rake available from your local home and garden store), aerate your soil, and topdress the lawn.

The Pests: Weeds, Insects, Diseases, Animals

The Pest Management Regulatory Agency has several pest notes specifically written for common pest problems of lawns and gardens, for example, ants, aphids, moles and voles, and white grubs. Please contact the Information Service or download a copy of these from the web site.

Beneficial Creatures



es insects that are pests, there e also many beneficial insects around your lawn, and you want to take precautions not to eliminate these if possible.

They fall into one of three categories.

Predators are insects that eat other pests (insects and weeds), such as ladybugs, centipedes, yellow jackets, praying mantis, lacewing larvae, syrphid fly larvae, and



ground beetles. Parasites are insects that live in or on other pests and are usually tiny wasps or flies such as the tachinid fly larvae. Pollinators are insects that feed on nectar or pollen and include bees, honeybees, some flies, butterflies, and moths.

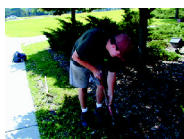
There are also in your lawn a variety of other beneficial creatures, such as earthworms that aerate your soil and microorganisms that decompose organic matter. Spiders and some mites are predatory on insects and other mites that are pests.

Equipment Requirements

What equipment you need depends on the size of your yard, how intensively you want to maintain it, whether you want to do it yourself, and the cost of the equipment. Common equipment needed is a mower, rake, hoe, shovel, bucket, shears, aerator, trimmer, and spreader. These are all available from a home and garden store and the staff there can help you clarify what you need. You can buy or rent most items.



Letting Someone Else Maintain Your Lawn



And if you prefer to let an expert take care of your lawn, decide what you want to use your lawn for and what approach you prefer for the maintenance of it. Professional lawn care services must be licensed and any employees applying pesticides must be certified. These companies stay informed about the latest technology and methods available. They are also safety conscious — yours and theirs. Many companies emphasize an integrated pest management approach, using chemical pesticides only after trying other options.

Integrated pest management or IPM is a process for planning and managing sites to prevent pest problems and for making decisions about when and how to intervene when pest problems occur. In an IPM program, pest managers use regular inspections, called monitoring, to collect the information needed to decide whether or not action must be taken. A key idea in IPM is that it is necessary to take action against pests only when their numbers warrant it, not as a routine measure. In most cases it is



only necessary to suppress pest populations to non-damaging levels, not to eliminate them. If treatment is warranted, pest managers choose the most appropriate combination of control measures for the site. You can use these principles in controlling pests around your yard and home.



Remember

Before Purchasing a Pesticide Product

- Identify the pest correctly.
- Use physical control methods and alternatives to pesticides.
- Read the label directions and safety precautions before buying the product. The label must include the name of the pest to be controlled and the treatment location (e.g., indoor, outdoor, garden uses, pet treatment).
- Purchase only the quantity of product needed for the treatment.
- Alternatively, you may choose to hire a licensed pest control operator.

When Using a Pesticide

- Carefully read all label instructions and precautions before using pesticides.
- Do not drink, eat or smoke while applying pesticides.
- Persons and pets should vacate the area during treatment. Cover or remove aquaria.
- If kitchen area is to be treated, cover or remove food, dishes and utensils.

After Handling a Pesticide

- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling any pesticide product.
- Do not permit persons or pets to contact treated surfaces until residue has dried completely.
- Provide adequate ventilation of treated areas after use.
- Wipe clean all surfaces that comes in direct contact with food, such as counters, tables and stovetops, including indoor and outdoor surfaces.
- Always store pesticides out of reach of children and pets and away from food and beverages.

In Case of Accidental Poisoning

- Call a poison control centre immediately and seek medical attention.
- Take the pesticide container or label with you to the emergency facility or physician.
- Follow first aid statements on the label.
- In case of accidental poisoning of pets seek veterinary attention immediately.



When Disposing of Pesticides

Do not reuse empty pesticide containers. Wrap and dispose of in household garbage.

Unused or partially used pesticide products should be disposed of at provincially or municipally designated household hazardous waste disposal sites.

Use Common Sense

- These are general recommendations.
- Consult the label for specific instructions.
- When in doubt, contact a professional.

Pest Management Regulatory Agency
2250 Riverside Drive
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9

Pest Management Information Service
Telephone: 1-800-267-6315
From outside Canada: (613) 736-3799*
*Long distance charges apply.
Fax: (613) 736-3798
Internet: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pmra-arla