



## HEALTHY LAWNS

### The Issue

Canadians take pride in having attractive lawns around their homes and many use lawn care products to maintain them. However, pesticide use for lawn care has become an issue in many communities across Canada, due to an increased awareness of the potential impact that human activities can have on our shared environment.

### Background

Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is responsible for registering all pesticides used in Canada. Rigorous health, environmental and value assessments are carried out on each pesticide before it is allowed to be sold or used in Canada.

The PMRA supports reducing reliance on pesticides and, along with provincial and territorial governments, has developed a national Healthy Lawns Strategy. Under this strategy, information encouraging homeowners to adopt environmentally sound lawn care practices, such as using pesticides only when necessary, has been developed. A well-maintained, healthy lawn is less likely to suffer from pest problems or need pesticides.

### Healthy Lawn Care

Growing a healthy lawn is a question of following a few basic steps that don't require a lot of time or money:

- **Fertilizing:** the type of fertilizer you use and the timing of the application are important. Compost or slow-

release fertilizers are preferable, and fertilizing in early fall promotes vigorous lawn growth the next spring. Clippings left on the lawn are rich in nitrogen and provide free and easy fertilization

- **Liming:** lime is applied when soil is too acidic (low pH) for good lawn growth; you can have the pH of your soil tested if you think this might be a problem.

- **Aeration:** compacted soil makes it difficult for water and oxygen to get to the roots. Aeration of the lawn is best done before top dressing and fertilizing.

- **Top dressing and over-seeding:** late summer or early fall, top dress your lawn with a thin layer of compost or good garden soil, and add grass seed appropriate to your site conditions. This will regenerate your lawn and take care of any thinned-out areas

- **Mowing:** rather than giving your lawn a close shave, mow it to a height of 7-8 cm, this will promote better root growth and competition with weeds. Keep your mower blade sharp and mow often enough that you don't take off more than one third of the growth

- **Irrigation:** give your lawn a deep watering, less often. Early morning or early evening are the best times to water, to minimize evaporation. It will also help prevent disease if the grass doesn't stay wet overnight

- **Variety:** plant a variety of grasses that can tolerate a range of growing conditions, such as sun and shade. Your lawn will then be less susceptible to pest damage
- **Substitutes:** where conditions are not suitable for a traditional lawn, try growing plants more adapted to the area. For example, periwinkle and lily of the valley are good ground covers for shaded sites, while creeping juniper and wild thyme are better for sunny dry sites. A variety of plants and grasses promotes biodiversity in your yard.
- **Helpers:** birds, beneficial insects, earthworms and many other creatures feed on lawn pests, help break down thatch and aerate the soil. More of these useful organisms are likely to thrive in your lawn if you reduce your use of insecticides and fungicides

## Pest Management

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) stresses pest prevention as its first principle. Manage pest problems by following IPM principles:

- Good soil, with ample depth and organic matter, and improved drainage in wet areas will help prevent problems
- Regular inspections will give you early warning of potential problems
- Be sure you correctly identify a pest or problem since beneficial insects may be mistaken for pests. Identifying the pest will help you decide if and when you need to apply a treatment

- Accept that a few weeds or insect pests won't noticeably harm a healthy lawn. Don't be alarmed at the first sign of a pest. It is not necessarily a threat to your lawn
- Attacking pest problems from several fronts is often more effective. For example, if chinch bugs are a problem, you can de-thatch the lawn, keep it well watered, increase the mowing height, keep nitrogen fertilization to a minimum, and over-seed with grass varieties that are resistant to chinch bugs. Such a combination of tactics will make it difficult for this pest to thrive

## Pesticides

Before resorting to herbicides, try managing weeds by improving the general condition of the lawn and doing some occasional hand weeding. If you decide that a pesticide is necessary, follow these steps:

- Before buying, make sure that the pesticide label has directions for use on lawns and lists the pest you want to control. Apply the product only where the pest is found; spot treat instead of applying broadly
- Always read the label; its instructions must be followed. The label will give you the directions for use, including how much to apply and when. It will also indicate whether protective clothing, gloves or equipment are needed
- Store pesticides out of the reach of children and pets and buy only the amount you expect to use in one season

## Lawn Care Services

If you choose this option, ask what type of services the companies offer and discuss the results you can expect. Avoid lawn care programs that regularly apply pesticides whether or not pests are present. If pesticides are used, make sure that they are part of an IPM program, where pesticides are applied only if pests are at levels that require control.

## Need more info?

The Healthy Lawns Web site provides comprehensive information for homeowners and green space professionals who wish to establish and maintain a healthy lawn while minimizing reliance on pesticides.

Contact us at:  
[www.healthylawns.net](http://www.healthylawns.net)

You can also contact the PMRA Web site at: [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pmra-arla](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/pmra-arla)

PMRA Lawn Care Publications available:

Establishing a Lawn  
 Lawn Maintenance  
 Common Lawn Problems  
 PMRA Pest Notes  
 (Effective control of...)  
 Pesticide use in and around the home

Contact us at the address listed below to obtain any of these publications..

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