

3 STEPS TO A GREENER, KID-FRIENDLY LAWN WITHOUT CHEMICALS



An organic lawn offers a safer and healthier environment for kids and pets to play and enjoy the outdoors. By promoting biodiversity and avoiding the use of harmful chemicals, an organic lawn can create a more sustainable and resilient ecosystem that benefits everyone.

There's so much for a child to explore and learn – right in your own back yard. Children can explore the biodiversity of your lawn by catching insects, worms, frogs, and by listening to birds sing. They can learn to identify different plants and explore their scents, colors and textures or lie back in the grass and watch the clouds.

Spending time barefoot in the grass helps build a robust microbiome for kids and adults.

Enjoying the outdoors and developing a love for nature is good for the body, mind, and spirit. Nature is also essential for long term mental health. But no parent wants their child playing in chemicals.

The EPA considers runoff from lawn chemicals a non-point source of water pollution. When it rains, the excess chemicals run off into streams and lakes.

These toxins can make their way into our drinking water. The nutrients that promote

grass growth also cause algae and pond weeds to grow. It creates a cycle that can affect food quality and the habitat for fish and other organisms. The overuse of nitrogen in farming and lawn can exacerbate a condition on many beaches called red tide.

Red tide is a natural phenomenon caused when algae release a toxin into the water that can harm or even kill marine life, and also pose a risk to humans who come into contact with affected water. Red tide events can have significant ecological and economic impacts, as they can lead to fish kills, beach closures, and harm to local seafood industries.

WHAT IS ORGANIC LAWN CARE?

Organic lawn care methods avoid the use of harmful chemicals commonly found in synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. These chemicals can have adverse effects on the health of children and pets who may come into contact with them through direct contact or ingestion.

Organic lawn care relies on natural methods to promote healthy soil and plant growth. Forgoing the chemicals can promote biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. By avoiding the use of chemicals, organic lawn care can support a variety of beneficial insects and microorganisms that can help control pests and improve soil health. This can create a more resilient and self-sustaining lawn that is less susceptible to pest infestations and disease.

Here are the three most impactful ways (plus a few honorable mentions) to keep your lawn a safe place for kids and pets.

ONE: CHOOSE A SAFE FERTILIZER AND APPLY IN THE FALL

There are many options for natural fertilizers. You can use compost, aged animal manure, or purchase an organic brand.

Don't just assume that your lawn needs to be fertilized, get your soil tested for levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium to find out if soil amendments are needed. Most local Agricultural Extension Offices will test your soil for free or for a small fee. Use an

interactive map to find your local Cooperative Extension System Office.

Contrary to what some chemical companies may lead you to believe, there's usually no reason to fertilize your lawn more often than once a year.

You should fertilize in the fall, which will allow the nutrients in the fertilizers to soak into the soil and be ready for uptake when your grass starts growing again in the spring. Skip spraying pesticides, herbicides, or insecticides and opt to pull weeds by hand or wear natural insect repellent as necessary.

To provide a sustainable, long-lasting source of nitrogen for your lawn, consider using organic fertilizers. Organic lawn fertilizers contain nutrients that are gradually released through biological processes. Unlike synthetic fertilizers, they do not contribute to soil acidification or runoff. Instead, the nutrients are stored within the soil food web until the plants require them.

While organic fertilizers may not produce an immediate, vibrant green color, they promote the overall health and durability of your lawn. Many garden centers offer a wide selection of organic matter fertilizers.

Over-fertilization is a major cause of pollution to our waterways, since the excess nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus run off into surface waters. An excess of nutrients in aquatic ecosystems will essentially fertilize plant life there, causing a state of eutrophication (imagine a pond covered in a green layer of algae).

Eutrophication can result in low oxygen levels, since all that plant growth will eventually die off and need to be decomposed by aerobic bacteria. Since all organisms need oxygen, this can have a devastating effect on the aquatic ecosystem.

TWO: MOW LESS OFTEN AND LEAVE MORE GRASS

Instead of mowing your lawn once a week, leave the grass a little longer and mow every two weeks. Longer grass will help to shade the soil, reducing the amount of evaporation of water in the soil, which will help your grass

in the hot summer months. Longer blades of grass will also improve the plant's photosynthesis, helping it to build a stronger root system.

Mowing less will also improve your air quality, since gas-powered lawn mowers release emissions that include carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and nitrous oxides that can lead to the formation of ground level ozone. If your lawn is small, you can eliminate those emissions altogether and use a human powered reel mower. Or if you live out in the country, consider raising sheep to keep your grass trimmed and provide natural fertilizer at the same time.

When you do mow the lawn, leave the clippings there. Often people want to remove grass clippings, but leaving them on the lawn will allow them to decompose and return important nutrients back into the soil. According to the New York City Department of Sanitation, leaving the clippings on the lawn can provide it with up to 25% of the nitrogen that the grass needs.

Consider overseeding or replacing your current lawn with native or organic grass seed. DLF Organic is the first US company to offer USDA-certified organic lawn seed that is grown without synthetic pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers.

DLF Organic provides three different seed mixes, including a sun mix, a shade mix, and a mix that includes nitrogen-rich clover. Another environmentally friendly option is using native turf-grass seed. These grasses are well-suited to their regional soil conditions and average rainfall, requiring less water and being more resistant to disease than non-native grasses like Kentucky bluegrass or St. Augustine grass.

THREE: SKIP OR REDUCE YOUR WATERING SCHEDULE

We often see sprinklers running when it is raining or shortly after a storm because they are set to automatic timers. This is a waste of water and will result in increased runoff into surface waters.

When you choose not to water – or only water as needed – you will reduce your overall water usage, water and/or electric bill, depending on whether you have a well or municipal water.

Rainwater is free of chlorine and other chemicals often found in tap water, making it a healthier and more natural option for your lawn. By collecting and using rainwater, you

can also reduce stormwater runoff, which can contribute to pollution and erosion in local waterways.

Pay attention to local weather patterns, and when you are experiencing drought follow the local advisories (or mandates) to refrain from watering your lawn.

Consider installing rain barrels. Rain water is free, and plants love it! You can also install a rainwater harvesting system to save water that falls onto your roof.

OTHER WAYS TO KEEP A GREEN LAWN WITHOUT CHEMICALS

A healthy lawn takes some time but not all that much money. When in doubt, try to use natural ingredients as often as possible. Here are a few ways to incorporate more organic lawn care into your yard maintenance routine.

Create more green areas with native plants

You can minimize outdoor water use and maintain soil integrity by using native, drought-tolerant plants. This approach is called xeriscaping. Native plants are a low maintenance addition to your landscape. Because local birds and other animals are used to living around these plants, you're actually helping to preserve biodiversity in your area.

Native plants also grow well in groups. They only need to be watered during establishment, and they're extremely adaptable to local conditions and to local pests. You can find which plants are native to your region at PlantNative.org.

Grow herbs and vegetables

One of the greenest things you can do with your yard is to make it productive. Turf doesn't serve much of a purpose. But growing food is a beneficial use of your space. It's also excellent for the planet, healthy for you, and a great way to spend time outside.

Start small with a little herb garden or work your way up to a food forest.

Build good soil

Green experts say the best place to start is with a soil test. Rich soil grows healthier grass and plants, and it reduces the need for additional fertilizers.

You can find mail-in soil kits at your local extension office or through online lab services. These reports give you an accurate

result of what nutrients your soil needs and how much you should use.

Embrace the imperfections

Tolerating or even embracing a few weeds or wild herbs can be a healthy practice for your landscape. Monocultures, which refer to a single type of plant grown in an area, are rarely found in natural ecosystems.

Allowing some diversity in your landscape can promote a more natural and sustainable environment. Some weeds and wild herbs can even have beneficial properties, such as providing food and habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.

Improving the soil can also help reduce the presence of weeds. Adding calcium can increase soil health and nutrient availability for desired plants, while making it harder for some weeds to grow.

And don't get rid of that lucky clover! Not only is clover actually good for your lawn, it's not the eyesore many people think it is. It's a rich green color, and when it's not making its little white flowers (which I happen to enjoy), it just looks like a green lawn from the street.

Clover is a great companion to grass because it converts nitrogen into fertilizer using bacteria in its own root system. So it actually improves your soil and makes your lawn better.

Keep your lawn weed-free naturally

Weeds happen – especially dandelions. Here are three natural weed control options to help slow their spread:

- 1) Combine 2 parts vinegar, 1 part water, and a few drops of dish soap in a spray bottle. On the morning of a hot day, spray the solution on the weeds but be careful not to get it on other plants.
- 2) Boil water and pour it on the weeds.
- 3) Use corn gluten all over your lawn to prevent weeds from ever coming up. Corn gluten only works as prevention and won't get rid of weeds that have already sprouted.

GET OUT AND ENJOY YOUR TOXIN-FREE LAWN

After all of the work you put into maintaining a safe, child-friendly lawn, be sure to take your children outside to breathe the clean air, get some sun to help make Vitamin D, and run around barefoot in the grass.

5 TIPS TO ADJUST TO TIME CHANGES



Many of these tips are great for any time of the year, but pay special attention to days around the clock change.

1. Go to bed and get up at the same time.

Get at least seven hours of sleep on the days before and after the transition. Lack of sleep tells the body to store fat. While staying up later or changing your habits is tempting, it's best to keep your bedtimes consistent. The closer you stick to your normal routine, the faster your body will adjust to the time change.

If you have a really tough time twice a year when the clocks change, start planning ahead. A few days in advance, gradually adjust sleep and wake times by shifting bedtime 15 to 20 minutes each night. This helps your body make gradual shifts and more slowly adjust.

2. Practice good habits before bedtime.

In the days after the time change, quit caffeinated beverages 4 to 6 hours before

bedtime. Avoid alcohol in the evening. If you are exercising, avoid workouts within 4 hours of bedtime because raising your body's core temperature can make it harder to fall asleep.

If you know you have a tough time with time changes, you need to avoid electronics near bedtime, at least for a few days afterward. Electronics' high-intensity light hinders melatonin, a hormone that triggers sleepiness. Light stimulates your brain and makes sleep difficult in the same way sunlight does. Also, turn off the television and pick up a book. Take a warm—not hot—shower. Dim the lights. Relax.

3. Keep your dinnertime consistent. Eat more protein and less carbs.

On the days around the time change, eat at the same time or even eat a little early. To ease the transition, shift your mealtime forward 15 minutes for a few days in a row.

Our sleep cycle and our eating patterns affect each other. Don't overeat. Also, if you find yourself feeling snacky, eat a snack that is high in protein instead of carbohydrates. (This might seem like good everyday advice, but it's even more important during time changes.)

Try fruit with peanut butter or cheese with crackers. Go shop for fish, nuts, and other sources of protein for dinner this week! Avoid the pasta and carb-loaded snacks!

4. Get more light!

Go outside and get exposure to morning sunlight on the Sunday after the time change to help regulate your internal clock. Having shorter daylight hours affects our mood and energy levels, decreasing serotonin. Make time to take a morning or early afternoon walk outside when the Sun is out. Try using a light therapy box or an alarm light that brightens as you wake up.

In the autumn and winter, it's dark after work. Consider shifting any outdoor exercise to when you can get sunlight; can you get outside for some morning light, even if you need to bundle up?

5. Take a short cat nap.

Some folks may disagree, but if you're starting to stack up sleepless hours, it's safer and healthier for your body to give in to a short nap than to continue without sleep. Make it a short nap (no more than 20 minutes) to restore lost sleep hours; however, do NOT take long naps. It may help to go outside into the natural sunlight to cue your body and help retrain your inner clock.



10 COMMON TOXIC PLANTS FOR PETS



SHORTBREAD LEMON TART

TOTAL TIME: PREP 20MIN | BAKE 25MIN

YIELD: 10 SERVINGS

INGREDIENTS

- 3 large eggs
- 1-1/4 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon grated orange zest
- 1/4 cup butter, melted

CRUST

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup confectioners' sugar
- 1/2 cup ground almonds
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon grated orange zest
- 1/2 cup cold butter, cubed

Additional confectioners' sugar
Fresh raspberries, optional

For a change from ordinary lemon bars, we added grated orange zest to both the crust and filling to turn the recipe into a lemon tart.



DIRECTION

- Let eggs stand at room temperature for 30 minutes.
- Preheat oven to 350°. Whisk together eggs, sugar, lemon juice and orange zest. Whisk in butter until smooth. Set aside.
- For crust, pulse first 6 ingredients in a food processor until mixture forms a ball. Press dough onto the bottom and up the sides of an ungreased 9-in. fluted tart pan with removable bottom.
- Pour lemon mixture into crust. Bake until center is almost set, 25-30 minutes. Cool on a wire rack. Just before serving, sprinkle with confectioners' sugar and, if desired, fresh raspberries.