



CARE FOR YOUR LAWN AND THE CREEK

Keeping a lush, weed-free lawn is almost always costly, labor-intensive and potentially damaging to the environment. Lawns provide little or no habitat or shade for native animals, and the root systems are too shallow to help stabilize soils or provide adequate filtration.

The Problem

A healthy lawn resists disease, drought damage, and weeds. While many lawns benefit from some extra nutrients once a year, fertilizing more often can harm your lawn and contribute to water quality problems. Excess fertilizers can run off when it rains, causing aquatic plants to go on growth and blooming binges. This robs the water of oxygen needed by aquatic organisms.

Did you know?
Turf grass is the single largest irrigated crop in the United States (3 times more than corn).

The Solution

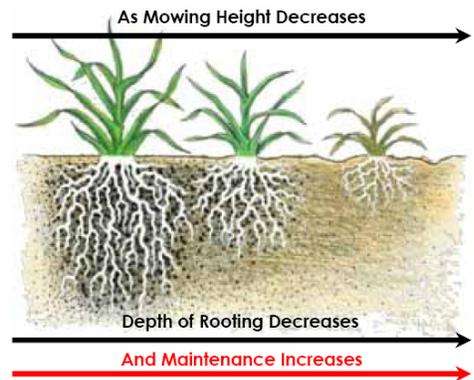
Proper fertilizing, mowing and watering practices will result in a high-quality turf that protects water quality by reducing storm water runoff, minimizing soil erosion and improving water infiltration into the soil.

Reduce the amount of yard that is planted in grass.

Try native ground covers that need less maintenance and provide a more interesting landscape.

Mow high and let lie.

- Cutting just the top third of the grass will help shade out weeds.
- Mulch grass clippings back onto the lawn where they'll quickly break down and provide free nutrients and organic matter to the soil and help it to retain moisture.
- Avoid mowing directly to the edge of lakes and streams. Grass clippings can get into the water and add excess nutrients as they break down. Having turf grass directly at the edge of a lake or stream also can exacerbate erosion problems. Long grass or other vegetation at the water's edge will help to filter pollutants in runoff, prevent erosion and improve habitat for wildlife.
- Keep mower blades sharp—dull blades will tear the grass blade which provides opportunities for turf diseases.
- Sweep excess grass clippings off hard or paved surfaces and back onto the lawn to prevent them from getting washed into waterways.



Did you know?
A poorly maintained gasoline lawnmower pollutes as much in one hour as a car driven for 348 miles.

Try aerating and de-thatching the lawn periodically to discourage weed growth and improve water absorption. The fall is a great time to aerate given soil conditions at that time of year.

Mow the right way at the right time of day. Mow in early evening, after the heat of the day, and before the dew settles. Lawns should be cut down to 2 inches twice a year – in the fall to prevent snow mold and in early spring to help stimulate growth and green up.

Varying the mowing pattern every time you mow prevents soil compaction. This will keep your soil and grass healthier.

Do a soil test.

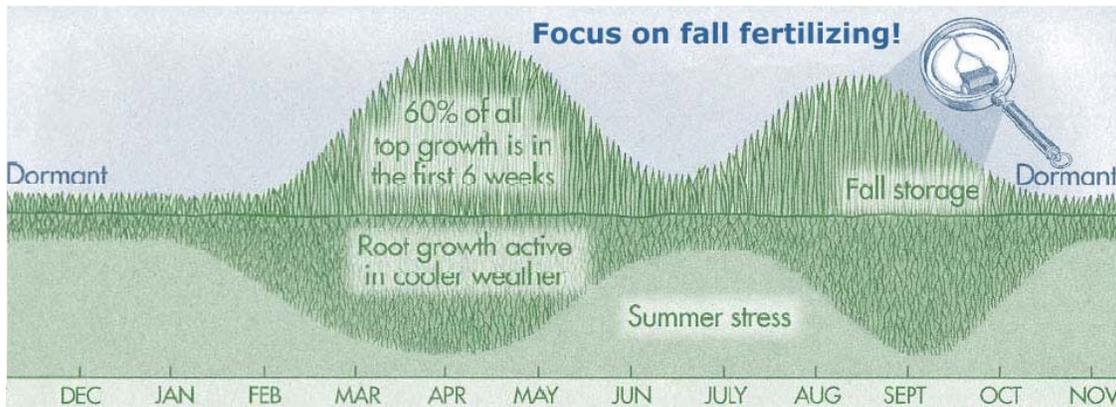
You don't know what your lawn needs without one! Most soils tested throughout the seacoast show that high levels of phosphorus are already present in the soil. Soil testing should be performed about every 2-3 years, or at any site where the topsoil has been disturbed and landscape renovation is under way. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension provides soil testing for only \$12/test. You can order soil sample kits online at www.umext.maine.edu.

Did you know?
Only 10-20% of lawn owners use soil tests to determine fertilizer application, and as a result, 52% of lawns are over-fertilized.

Use less (or no) fertilizers.

Unless you have a soil test that identifies a need for phosphorus and potassium, all you need is nitrogen. Lawns older than 10 years need only clippings to keep them "fertilized".

If fertilization is necessary, start with 1/3 of the amount recommended on the bag label, monitor the lawn, and apply more only if the lawn needs it. Look for 10-0-0 on the bag. Use organic slow-release fertilizers with the right nutrients to improve soil health and fertility. Slow-release of the nutrients ensures you're only feeding your lawn – not our streams, rivers and groundwater. Only apply once a year (preferably in the fall). Accept a few weeds, especially clover, which improves the soil.



Consider not watering, letting your lawn go dormant in the summer. Not only will you save water, but think of all the time you'll save by not having to mow during the hottest months! Be careful not to over-water the lawn because this wastes water, promotes runoff, and makes your lawn prone to disease.

Limit or full eliminate the use of pesticides.

- Practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM). This approach utilizes a system of strategies to keep pests, including insects, weeds and diseases to acceptable levels (since you can't realistically eliminate all pests). Fundamental to IPM is the concept of "Know what the problem is before you apply pesticides." To learn more visit <http://pronewengland.org/INFO/PROInfoIPM.htm>.
- Make sure that you pick a product that matches your specific pest problem and apply it according to the label's instructions.
- Limit pesticide use by spot-treating problem areas rather than using blanket treatments.
- Keep products off of hard or paved surfaces, such as driveways and sidewalks.

Did you know?
It is estimated the average American spends 40 hours every year mowing their lawn.

For more tips on yard and lawn care, visit <http://cumberlandswcd.org/yardscape/factsheets.htm>.



Spruce Creek Watershed Improvement Project
Town of Kittery, Maine
200 Rogers Road Extension
Kittery, Maine 03904
www.protectkitterywaters.org