

Lawn Care for a Healthy Lake



Conventional lawns are typically made up of a small number of fine turfgrasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass. To keep them green, homogenous and manicured, they require weekly mowing and regular watering. All of this can be time consuming, costly, and resource-intensive. Some of these practices can have adverse impacts, including:

- **Increased water consumption.** Municipal water consumption doubles in the summer, mainly as a result of lawn and garden watering. Excess consumption lowers water tables and reduces stream flows, which affects fish and other aquatic life.
- **Increased air and noise pollution.** Regular use of electric- or gasoline-powered mowers and equipment discharges air pollutants and creates noise.
- **Increased use of fertilizers and pesticides.** These chemicals can leach into groundwater and enter streams and lakes through stormwater runoff, causing negative consequences for water quality and aquatic life. Over time, fertilizer residue can lower soil quality.

Your lawn is connected to Lake Superior—every time there is a summer storm, the rain flows over your lawn picking up everything on the grass. The rain then goes down the storm drain carrying a load of excess fertilizer, pesticides, pet waste, litter and whatever else it picked up on the way. This contaminated storm water is channeled directly into our rivers and streams, and from there into Lake Superior. Take good care of your lawn, and you will take good care of Lake Superior!

Choosing the right grass

- There are many varieties of grass, and some require less maintenance than others. Choose seed mixtures containing Fescue, a grass variety that is more drought-tolerant and requires less sun and fertilizers. Start a new lawn in the spring or fall when there is plenty of rain.

Mowing

- Mow high. Set your blades to 7cm (about 3") in the spring and fall and 10cm (4 ") in the summer. If your lawn is too short, the grass plants become stressed and lose the ability to absorb sunlight efficiently and develop healthy roots.
- Mow only when needed, depending on weather. Remove no more than 1/3 the length of the blade of grass for best results. Remember to keep your lawn longer in the heat of the summer to protect the grass roots from drying out
- Use sharp mower blades to cut the grass cleanly. Mowing in dry weather will also protect the grass from tearing or ripping.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn. The clippings will become food for worms, and break down into fertilizer for your lawn. If you must rake, compost the clippings or use them as garden mulch.



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Healthy lawns are less likely to have pest problems.

Keep your lawn healthy using good maintenance practices. It will better tolerate drought, temperature extremes and general wear and tear.

Fast-growing, deep-rooted lawns are less vulnerable to pest damage and do not usually need pesticides to control pests.

Longer, thicker grass prevents many pests and weeds from invading the lawn.

Signs that you need to aerate your lawn:

- The ground is hard and compacted.
- Thatch is building up.
- Water does not penetrate well.
- Broadleaf weeds are moving in.

Sources:

http://healthycanadians.gc.ca/healthy-living-vie-saine/environnement-environnement/home-maison/lawn_healthy-saine_pelouse-eng.php

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2009). *About your House: Low-Maintenance Lawns.*

Watering

- Only water when really necessary. Most grass growth will happen in the spring and early fall, and the grass will go dormant during the hot summer months when there is less rain. Don't water when rain is in the forecast – let Nature water for you. An inch of water once a week is sufficient.
- Water less but water deeply. Infrequent deep watering will encourage your lawn to develop strong deep roots. Deep roots will protect your lawn from drought and weeds.
- Water in the morning to reduce evaporation.

Topdressing and overseeding

- Increase the fertility of your soil by spreading a very thin layer of compost or topsoil over your lawn. When done after aerating, the topdressing material can be worked into the soil with a rake. Apply new grass seed, preferably Fescue, to areas of your lawn that have become thin or worn out.
- Overseeding will create a thick turf that helps crowd out weed seed. Overseed in cool spring or fall weather, and water until the new grass is established.

Fertilizing

- Most lawns will receive enough nutrients from grass clippings and from compost topdressing. Natural soil amendments such as manure or compost support soil organisms and promote healthy root growth. If you want to provide a quick nitrogen boost to your lawn, choose a natural amendment such as kelp meal or blood meal.
- If you must use a synthetic fertilizer, do not apply more than recommended. Any extra fertilizer that is not used by the grass plants can make its way to Lake Superior through the storm drains after a rain, or when you water your lawn.

Raking

- Rake your lawn thoroughly in spring and fall to remove fallen leaves and other debris. This is also a good time to top dress with a thin layer of compost or other natural soil amendments.

Love your weeds

- A lawn is a collection of grass plants, but other plants such as clover, creeping charlie or dandelions can sometimes move in. Learn to tolerate a diverse lawn.
- If you can't live with the weeds, make sure to remove the roots when you pull them out. Put a small amount of grass seed on the bare soil left behind to prevent other weed seeds from moving in.

Eliminate pesticides and herbicides

- Pesticides kill the organisms which contribute to a healthy soil. The sooner you remove harsh chemicals, the faster your soil will improve. It will take time—at least a season—for the soil to begin to recover from repeated past use of toxic chemicals that may have destroyed the microbiotic life that exists in healthy soil.

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