

# Healthy Lawns, Healthy Families

Presented by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

## How to use natural alternatives

### The natural vision

Natural lawn care requires a new way of looking at your lawn. You'll be aiming for a lot of biological activity in the soil, so the healthy grass can form a thick cover discouraging weeds, and an extensive root system that is resistant to drought. Healthy soil means lots of earthworms and microorganisms, which need plenty of organic matter to flourish.

When you use chemical fertilizers, the lawn becomes more susceptible to drought and disease. Over time, lawns can become chemically dependent. Organic fertilizers work in a different way, providing a more complete set of nutrients and don't need to be applied as often, resulting in healthier soil and turf.

Chemical pesticides can kill the very microorganisms that make a healthy lawn possible. Having a healthy lawn requires a different kind of activity for your lawn care.

### Moving towards a more healthy lawn

Begin practicing activities that will lead to a healthy and great looking lawn.

1. Feed your soil; it's the key to your healthy organic lawn. It needs to be alive with beneficial microorganisms and bugs. Apply a thin layer of compost in the spring and fall over the lawn, and water gently to wash the nutrients and microbes into the soil.
2. Water your lawn deeply (about one inch) on a weekly basis to establish healthy root systems. To measure the amount of water you are applying, place a tuna can under the sprinkler and time how long it takes for an inch to accumulate
3. Mow lawn to a height of three inches. This is the ideal growth height for the types of grasses most people grow.
4. Leave your grass clippings on the lawn. They are full of nutrients to feed the lawn.
5. To fertilize, apply compost and grass clippings throughout the growing season. A slow-release organic fertilizer can be added in the early fall. It can also be used in the early spring.
6. Use an aerator every four years before fertilizing. Best results can be achieved by renting the equipment designed for that purpose. It pulls plugs of dirt and grass out of the lawn to allow air and water in.
7. Top dress with finished compost over the lawn after aerating and weeding, and before seeding. This can be done in the spring or fall.
8. Overseed, sprinkling grass seed throughout the lawn in the spring and fall. This helps fill in bare spots and choke out weeds.

### If you want to use some chemicals

If you do use chemicals, remember to follow precautions. It's important not to use too much. That's bad for the lawn, bad for the water and potentially bad for you. Excess chemicals won't be absorbed, so they will travel with rainfall or heavy watering into storm drains and eventually into the river.

If you use pesticides, or weed and feed products (which contain pesticides) remember that the residue can be tracked into your home on your shoes, so be sure to leave the shoes in a shed or garage. Keep all chemical preparations away from children and pets to avoid accidental exposure.

You don't need to use weed and feed products over the entire lawn. You can just apply to weedy areas.

Pesticides should be disposed of properly. We recommend that you take them to a hazardous waste collection site or event.