

HOME & GARDEN

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SUPPLEMENT TO THE RECORD-EAGLE

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Prevention keeps good lawns healthy

BY CHERYL WALKER
Copley News Service

If your lawn isn't rolling in green by now, it's high time to get that yard in shape. It may be a matter of reseeding, or maybe starting from scratch with a whole new type of grass. Whatever lawn path is taken, there are some good tips to follow.

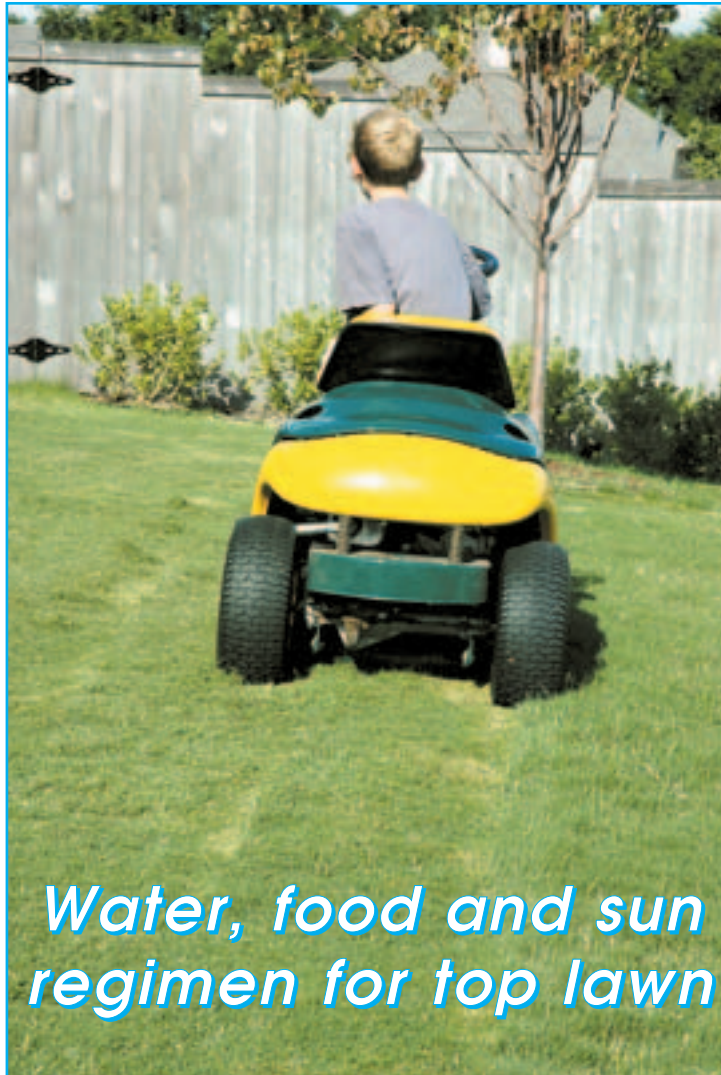
Before deciding on a type of grass, a few environmental questions should be answered. Will the lawn get a lot of sun or shade, and will irrigation be needed? Probably one of the most important factors that should be considered is the amount of foot traffic on the lawn. If there are still youngsters who are going to play outdoors, a sturdier grass should be considered.

Grasses are generally divided into two classifications — cool season and warm season. In climates where there are freezing temperatures and frost for a good part of the year, cool-season grass is the way to go. There are some grasses which do well in both warm and cool climates, such as creeping bent grass, buffalo grass and zoysia grass.

One of the most popular cool-season grasses is Kentucky bluegrass. Bermuda grass is the most widely used warm-season.

After the grass is chosen there are some steps to take to get it to grow well and keep it in good shape.

Defending your turf



Water, food and sun regimen for top lawn

Sunshine is probably one of the most important things a good lawn needs. It should receive a minimum of sun six hours a day.

According to Douglas Green, author of *The Everything Lawn Care Book* (Adams Media Corp., \$14.95), his first rule in taking care of a lawn is food.

"You only have to feed your plants if you want flowers, fruit or growth," he said. "Remember that lawns are

composed of thousands of individual grass plants. If you want them to grow, you have to feed them."

Nitrogen is an important ingredient in lawn food, as it is considered the engine of plant growth. Grass uses a lot of nitrogen and if it does not have the right amount, the lawn won't look its best or grow very well. A sign of an underfed lawn with a nitrogen deficiency is grass that turns yellow and does not grow very fast.

Although nitrogen is a good thing, it can be harmful too. Just as people sometimes overeat, grass can also be overfed. Too much nitrogen will burn the grass and it will die.

Of course the most obvious nutrient a good lawn needs is water. This is one of the most difficult tasks in taking care of a yard because there is no easy answer. When watering a lawn, many things have to be taken into consideration: the amount of sunshine, the type of soil and the climate. Green's rule of thumb on watering is that most lawns require between "1 and 1 1/2 inches of water a week to thrive."

Now that the turf is growing and doing well with food and water, upkeep comes into play. While we think that mowing the lawn is good, grass doesn't like to be mowed. As Green puts it, "it just happens to be good at recovering from this abuse."

When a lawn is mowed, it cuts off the tip of the grass blades and leaves it open to disease. It also reduces the grass's ability to feed itself. But nonetheless, lawns still have to be cut to keep from growing too tall. Green offers a rule on this procedure: "Never cut more than 30 percent of the height of the grass at any given mowing."

And don't feel like you have to pick up those lawn clippings after the grass is cut. Leaving them on the lawn allows the nitrogen in the leaf ends to be absorbed back into the grass.

Organic care can keep lawns green, too

BY PAUL L. HUARD
Copley News Service

Natural lawn care might be the next step if you love the environment and your yard equally.

Once considered the method of people only concerned with the "greening" of the planet, the organic practice is steadily growing in popularity as an alternative to conventional lawn care — the total use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides applied by the homeowner or a lawn-care service.

"The problem with the constant use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers is that they cause the loss of the biology of the soil," said Doug Bryant, owner of Organic Plant-It in Traverse City. "Force-feeding plants and grass creates an unhealthy garden and lawn."

Natural (organic) lawn care is different. Homeowners improve soil by adding organic matter such as compost (made from plant wastes) or animal manure (chiefly composted cow, chicken or horse manure) and other naturally occurring substances.

"Using an organic high performance fertilizer like Turf Nurture lets the grass feed as it needs to," Bryant said. "For weed control on lawns, corn gluten is great pre-emergent. And can be applied throughout the season for general maintenance. Also, a healthy lawn is naturally more resistant to weeds, insects and disease problems."

Healthy soil full of plant nutrients is a key part of organic lawn care. Improved soil contributes to healthy plants that will be less susceptible to damage from pests or environmental stress.

Bryant recommends letting your grass grow a little longer: "Because of photosynthesis, the longer your blade, the more sun it is able to take in and the

greener and healthier the grass."

Advocates of natural lawn care say one result is the need to apply fertilizer less frequently than in conventional lawn care.

People who use organic methods control weeds, insects and diseases proactively toward common maladies, rather than wiping out weeds and diseases with chemicals after they crop up.

The National Wildlife Foundation says last year, the average suburban lawn received 10 times as much pesticide per acre as farmland, and more than 70 million tons of fertilizers and pesticides are applied to family lawns and gardens annually.

If you are interested in an alternative to conventional lawn care, contact your city or county government. Many local government agencies can provide you with information about organic lawn care.

Also, your university extension office or state master gardener program often has experts who can provide details about composting, evaluating lawns and reducing fertilizer and pesticide use.

"It's important to remember that the soil beneath us is a living universe and it's important to take care of that first," Bryant said.

Don't forget the Internet. There are many sites that can offer information on organic lawn care:

- *Organic Lawn Care for the Cheap and Lazy* at www.rich-soil.com. The site is easy to read and has good information.

- www.eartheasy.com offers multiple pages with a variety of suggestions on organic gardening and growing. The site devotes an entire section to "natural lawn care."

- The nonprofit U.S. Composting Council at www.compostingcouncil.org offers a links page with an exhaustive list of Web sites that have information on backyard composting and natural lawn care.

— Additional information by Record-Eagle/Rick Gould

Acres of irises



Photos/John L. Parker

With the hot weather, irises are peaking early this year. Bill Black, owner of the Iris Farm on W-72, five miles out of Traverse City, has six acres with over 800 colors of the flower to choose from. You can buy cut flowers now and place orders for bulbs later, for planting in Aug.-Sept. Black said that the irises have huge blooms with hardy stalks — "they've come a long way from the blooms you may remember from your grandmother's garden." The Iris Farm is open seven days a week. For more, call 947-9040.



Lawn party

Some grass species are not as resistant to shade, wear and tear or disease as others. Therefore, in some areas of a lawn, there may need to be a mix. This will make a more durable lawn, but it may not be as nice to look at as a single-species lawn.

Grass	Advantages	Disadvantages
Couch	Good traffic and drought tolerance	Poor shade tolerance
Kikuyu	Good all-around toughness	Very aggressive in garden beds
Buffalo	Good drought and shade tolerance	Harsh foot feel
Kentucky bluegrass	Fair drought tolerance	Not recommended for medium-low rainfall areas
Tall fescue	Good wear tolerance	Best of the winter grasses for water use
Broad-leaf carpet grass	Good for shade	Poor drought and wear tolerance



Father's Day Sale!

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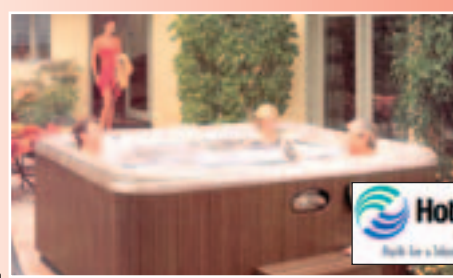
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