



## Why Go Natural?

There are many reasons to switch to natural lawn care:

1. Takes less time and energy.
2. Costs less.
3. Conserves water.
4. Produces less yard waste.
5. Protects beneficial soil organisms.
6. Creates a lawn that is resilient during drought.
7. Releases fewer toxic chemicals into the environment.
8. It is healthier for our families, pets, and wildlife.

### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

***The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation state that low-maintenance lawns take:***

- ***50 % less time***
- ***85 % less money***
- ***50 % less fuel***
- ***85 % less fertilizer***
- ***100 % less water***
- ***100 % less pesticides***

***- than conventional lawns***

***The City of Revelstoke endorses reducing pesticide use. Efforts are on-going to reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides and herbicides in city parks and playing fields.***

## Revelstoke Eco-Fact Sheet

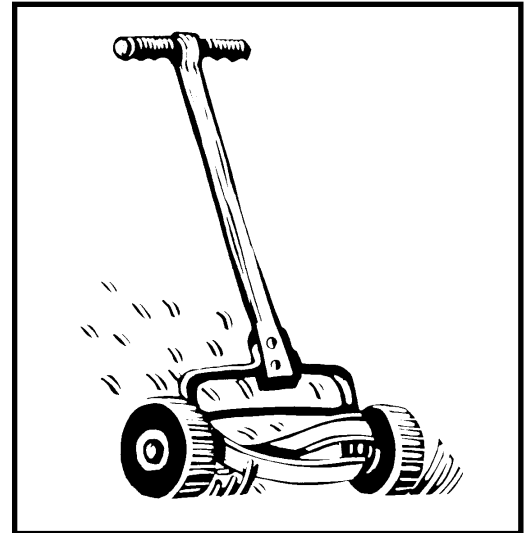
# Natural Lawn Care

## The Perfect Lawn?

How do you define the perfect lawn? Is it a lush, deep green, carpet-like lawn that requires weed killer, close mowing, raking and bagging of clippings, regular watering, fertilizers, and pesticides? Or do you define the perfect lawn as one that saves money, time, and energy; decreases your impact on the environment; and isn't harmful to your family, pets, and neighbours?

Many people have decided that the costs of high maintenance lawns are just too great. They want an attractive lawn, but are not willing to risk exposing their families and the environment to the hazards of herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. Nor do they like having to rush out to take advantage of every minute allowed by the City's watering regulations. They don't want to spend the time and money for fertilizers that don't seem to have lasting effects. And finally, they don't want to be a slave to mowing, raking, and bagging every weekend and then hauling away bags of yard waste.

The most important thing to remember is that healthy soil is the foundation of a healthy lawn. If your soil has been damaged by years of chemical and pesticide use, is heavily compacted, or full of weeds, it may take a few years to build a healthy lawn. For tips on planting a low



maintenance lawn or rejuvenating a seriously damaged lawn check the Canadian Gardening and Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation resources listed on the next page.

If you have an average lawn, even one that is chemically dependent, it should respond within two to three seasons of natural lawn care. Natural lawn care practices help to build healthy soil and vigorous, deep-rooted lawns. A healthy lawn is more resistant to disease, tolerates some insect and drought damage, and will out-compete many weeds.

### **Health Effects of Pesticides**

Symptoms of pesticide poisoning are sometimes misdiagnosed as flu or allergies. Poisoning happens when pesticide residues are inhaled or absorbed through the skin. If you can smell it, it's in your body.

Children and pets are particularly at risk from lawn chemicals because they play and roll around on lawns.

**Long term consequences are serious and include lowered fertility, increased risk of cancer, birth defects and problems with the immune system.**

# Elements of Natural Lawn Care

A good way to begin natural lawn care is by aerating your lawn. Not only will this help badly compacted soil receive oxygen, nutrients, and water deep down in the root zone, but many weeds hate well aerated soil.

Aerate your lawn each spring, or a minimum of every second year until the return of earthworms and other below-ground organisms reduces the need for manual aeration.

Follow it up with a top-dressing of soil. Compost is great or well-rotted (or sterilized) manure. Even a thin layer will improve soil structure and feed your soil.

Re-seeding is the next step to fill in bare spots and help reduce the chance of new weeds sprouting. It is also a good way to introduce hardy, pest-resistant and low-maintenance grass varieties such as perennial ryegrass and fine fescues to your lawn.

A lawn with diverse grass types will be better able to recover from stresses such as droughts, pest outbreaks, disease, and traffic. Re-seeding is most effective in the spring or early fall.

Leave mulched grass clippings on your lawn to provide up to 40% of the nitrogen required and promote development of complex soil structure with lots of microbial activity. As your soil becomes healthier, your lawn's fertilizer needs will lessen.

A healthy natural lawn will be medium green in colour, rather than the deep green brought on by excessive nitrogen. Also-

- Mow high, at least 6.5 cm (2 ½ inch). Longer grass means deeper roots and helps minimize moisture loss by shading the root zone.
- Mow often enough that you don't cut off more than one-third of the grass at any one time.

- Leave your clippings on the lawn, they provide free fertilizer and keeps roots moist. Contrary to popular belief, it does not cause thatch buildup.

- Keep your mower blade sharp. Dull blades tear the grass, leaving it open to disease and heat stress.

- Don't cut wet grass. This can spread lawn diseases and cause clippings to clump and smother the grass.

- Don't overwater your lawn. Your lawn needs a maximum of 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water per week. In Revelstoke we often don't have to add extra water.

- A good way to see if your lawn needs water is the step test – if you step on the grass and it does not spring back, watering is required. Walk around your lawn, sometimes only certain areas may need water, not the whole lawn.

- If you don't have a large lawn, buy a push-mower. The only side effect of the push-mower is a workout that is good for your health.

A word on pest control: Revelstoke lawns do not have a lot of pest problems and keeping your lawn healthy is your best defense. In a vigorously growing lawn, insect populations will rarely reach levels that require treatment and weeds will be crowded out.

## Here are some natural lawn care tips for dealing with pests:

- Accept a few plants that are not grass in your lawn. Remove the ones that you really can't stand by hand.

- Try not to use chemicals on your lawn. Herbicides and insecticides harm beneficial plants, insects, birds, etc. They cause serious health risks in humans and pets.

## For More Information

- <http://www.northcolumbia.org/> for more links and also check out the NCES at the Library.

- <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca> search the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation website for "landscaping" and download information on Low-Maintenance Lawns.

- <http://www.canadiangardening.com> search for "lawns" to find an excellent article on carefree lawns including information on choosing grass species and a list of seed sources.

- <http://www.healthylawns.net> for information on Canada's Healthy Lawns Strategy and lawn care tips.

- <http://www.seattle.gov> search for "natural lawn care" for excellent information.

- Check the Revelstoke Library for *Beautiful easy lawns and landscapes: a year-round guide to a low-maintenance, environmentally safe yard*, and *How to get your lawn & garden off drugs: a basic guide to pesticide-free gardening in North America*, and *How to Get Your Lawn off Grass: A North American Guide to Turning Off the Water Tap and Going Native* (2002), both by Carole Rubin.

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