



# REDUCING PESTICIDES

...a perfectly natural approach  
to lawn and garden care.





## GOING NATURAL

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Concern about the impact of pesticides on our health and our environment has led more and more people to switch to natural lawn and garden care methods. Given the City of Toronto's pesticide by-law, natural gardening is receiving increased attention as a great way to keep our city healthy and beautiful. Like most things that are perfectly natural, it makes good sense.

This brochure provides an overview of the basics and benefits of natural lawn and garden care. Most importantly, you can create a beautiful lawn or garden without putting your health or the health of others at risk.



## WHAT IS NATURAL LAWN AND GARDEN CARE ALL ABOUT?

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The natural approach is based on the fact that a healthy lawn or garden needs good soil, appropriate growing conditions and the right amount of water. The bottom line is that if these conditions are maintained, pesticides shouldn't be necessary.

Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides and fungicides. While pesticides can help promote a uniformly green lawn or weed-free garden, they don't contribute directly to plant health. Having some pests present in your yard is part of maintaining a naturally healthy environment for all living things.

## HOW CAN I CONTROL THE WEEDS ON MY GRASS WITHOUT PESTICIDES?

Healthy turf plants will help crowd out some weeds. Leaving grass clippings on your lawn (grasscycling) decreases weeds by up to 60% and provides 30% of your lawn's fertilizer needs.

## QUICK TIP

Keep your mower blades sharp to avoid tearing grass. Wait until the grass is about 11 cm (4.5 inches) high before cutting back to a 7.5 cm (3 inch) height. You'll need to cut about once a week in spring and fall and every 1 to 2 weeks in summer.

## THE BASICS

### GROW A FULL HEAD OF GRASS

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Think of your lawn like you would a head of hair. If you give your lawn a brush cut, the soil that supports it is more likely to dry out and the grass roots will weaken. Longer grass, on the other hand, holds moisture better and shades the soil that nourishes it, leading to longer, hardier roots.

Setting your lawn mower at a high level (7.5 cm/3 inches) is perhaps the most important step to having a naturally healthy lawn that chokes out weeds.

## TAKE THE EASY ROUTE GRASSCYCLE

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The easiest and most lawn-friendly approach is grasscycling, which means leaving grass clippings on your lawn. Bagging your grass clippings takes time and energy. It also deprives your lawn of moisture and fertilizer. Besides, the City doesn't collect grass clippings.





## GIVE YOUR LAWN A FACIAL

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Just as pores on your skin can clog, soil can also get clogged or compacted from ordinary use. When this happens, air, water and compost have a harder time getting to plant and grass roots. The best solution is core aeration, which involves removing deep plugs of soil, breaking them up by raking and leaving the remaining pieces of

soil on the surface. Core aerators can be rented at most equipment rental outlets.



### SPREAD GOODNESS

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To thicken your lawn and crowd out weeds, spread grass seeds on thin patches in the spring or fall.

Spreading compost, also known as top-dressing, improves soil, reduces weeds, lowers water requirements and can help protect your lawn or garden through the winter. Top-dressing involves adding

light amounts of compost to your lawn, ideally before seeding and after aeration.

Choose grass varieties that are best suited to your yard.

**KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS** – grows well in sunny areas

**FESCUES** – good for partially shady and dry conditions

**PERENNIAL RYEGRASS** – grows quickly, drought tolerant and pest-resistant

## QUICK TIP

Hand pull weeds when the soil is moist – the roots will pull out much easier.

Water in the early morning to prevent evaporation or on weekends when the demands on the City's water supply are not at their peak.

## KEEP YOUR SOIL WELL FED

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Healthy lawns and gardens begin with healthy soil. Along with top-dressing and grasscycling, consider using organic fertilizers. They provide a natural, slow-release of organic matter to enrich soil and add nutrients that promote healthy growth.

## ALL THINGS IN MODERATION

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When it comes to watering your lawn or garden, the key is how much and how often.

When watering, it helps to know your soil type. Typically, sandy soils require 3.75 cm (1.5 inches) of water per week, while clay soils need 2.5 cm (1 inch) weekly.

Encourage deep root growth by watering deeply in one session. Remember to account for rainfall.

Your garden will need less water if you plant native species. They are more tolerant to drought.





## DIVERSIFY — BE DIFFERENT

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There is an ideal plant and grass type for almost every light and soil condition. Your lawn or garden is more likely to thrive if you match grasses and plants to your property conditions and expected use. Shrubs, wildflowers, vines and perennials are attractive alternatives to grass and can attract butterflies, birds and other helpful creatures.

Your local lawn care company or garden centre can tell you what plants and grasses are best suited to your soil type and light conditions.



## BRING IN REINFORCEMENTS

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One of the problems with pesticides is that in addition to killing pests, they often kill or harm other living things that are beneficial to your lawn or garden. By creating a healthy environment for birds, earthworms, ladybugs, dragonflies and other garden-friendly creatures, you can manage pests naturally.

HOW CAN I CONTROL THE WEEDS IN MY GARDEN AND AROUND TREES?

Placing a thin layer of mulch 5 to 7.5 cm (2-3 inches) around the base of plants, shrubs and trees will help conserve water, manage weeds and enrich the soil. Landscape fabric covered by the same thin layer of mulch will manage weeds in new planting beds.

For information about the pesticide by-law, you can get a copy of the information brochure “How Will Toronto’s Pesticide By-Law Affect Me? ...and other perfectly natural questions.” at most public libraries, on our website or by calling 416-338-7600.

NEED MORE INFORMATION? – [www.toronto.ca/pesticides](http://www.toronto.ca/pesticides)

OR CALL THE CITY OF TORONTO INFORMATION LINES:

Toronto Health Connection (Pesticide by-law info)	416-338-7600
Composting Helpline	416-392-4689
Lawn Improvement Helpline (for tips on lawn care and to order a complimentary Pesticide-Free sign)	416-397 LAWN (5296)

#### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Master Gardeners Horticultural Information Line	416-397-1345
Organic Landscape Alliance (OLA) <a href="http://www.organiclandscape.org">www.organiclandscape.org</a>	1-866-824-7685
Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA) <a href="http://www.torontoenvironment.org">www.torontoenvironment.org</a>	416-596-0660

