

Consider alternatives

In areas where a lawn does not thrive or is not needed, groundcover is a wonderful alternative. There are a variety of low maintenance ground covers for all types of sites. Ask your local nursery about the best choice for your yard.

Have realistic expectations

Pesticide-free maintenance will not produce a “perfect” lawn. A healthy lawn will probably have some pests and weeds. Remove problem weeds by hand in the spring and fall and keep in mind that many “weeds” can actually be beneficial. For example, there is a bacterium that grows on the roots of clover that converts nitrogen gas from the air into a form that plants can use, eliminating the need for nitrogen fertilizers.



Encourage beneficial creatures

Gardens are complex ecosystems with many visible and hidden elements working to keep it in balance. Some insects are beneficial to lawns and gardens, such as ladybugs that eat plant-killing aphids. Other insects, birds, bats, frogs and snakes provide valuable assistance by controlling pests. Encourage these creatures to live in your garden with special plantings, bird planters or water. Give them a chance to manage the environment without using pesticides.

Remember that many pesticides are non-selective. While they can eliminate one pest, they also may harm beneficial soil bacteria and insects, as well as other organisms such as birds, honeybees, frogs, and other valuable species. The loss of these helpful organisms can create an even bigger problem as more pesticides and chemical fertilizers are needed to replace the jobs that beneficial creatures do for free.

For more information see:

Let it Grow Naturally (City of Burnaby)
www.city.burnaby.bc.ca/cityhall/departments/engnrn/engnrn_whtshp/engnrn_whtshp_wrkshp.html

Pesticide Free. . . A Guide to Natural Lawn and Garden Care (City of Toronto)
www.toronto.ca/pesticides

Lawn Care Tips (Health Canada)
www.healthylawns.net

Natural Lawn and Garden Care (City of Seattle)
www.seattle.gov/util/services/yard/natural_lawn_&_garden_care/index.asp

Start finding...

...natural alternatives to pesticides.

It really is simple to have a beautiful, natural garden and lawn without the use of potentially cancer-causing chemicals in pesticides – so why not try?

Exposure to toxic chemicals in pesticides might cause cancer and other health problems. Take steps now to stop using pesticides on lawns and gardens for cosmetic purposes.

When pesticides are used to enhance the appearance of private lawns and gardens and have no benefit to human health, it is referred to as the **cosmetic use of pesticides**.

There are simple steps to make your yard chemical-free by using natural lawn care, encouraging beneficial insects and small natural predators and rethinking how you maintain landscaping. If you start making small changes like this, you will create a healthier place for your family and your community.

Take Note!

Pesticides kill pests; they don't change the conditions that encourage pests. Changing the conditions that allow pests to thrive is the most important step in solving a pest problem.

Build healthy soil

Soil that is healthy produces plants which are less likely to be damaged by pests or disease. Fertile soil – full of moisture, loose and well-drained – supports an intricate web of plant and animal life. You can build healthy soil by adding organic matter to it. The best organic matter is compost, an earthy material produced naturally by decaying plant and animal waste. Compost is easy to make in your own backyard. It increases the moisture in the soil and is good for the microorganisms living within it. These microorganisms break down organic matter, slowly releasing nutrients into the area around plant roots. You can also use compost as mulch to keep weeds under control, reduce moisture loss, protect plant roots and limit soil run-off. Spread a layer about 1-2 inches deep around plants in the spring.



Instead of using pesticides, build healthy soil to defend against pests and weeds.

Think before you dig

Put some thought into the plants you select for your property and reduce the need for pesticides.

- Choose plants that suit local conditions. Often what looks like a pest or disease is actually a plant struggling with the quality of soil, exposure to light or too much/too little moisture. Check the environmental conditions that a plant needs to thrive.
- Choose native plants. They are naturally resistant to pests.
- Grow a variety of plants. This discourages pests from settling and reproducing in a garden.
- Plant groundcover between taller plants and shrubs before weeds establish themselves.
- Buy pest-resistant varieties of your favorite plants.
- Add plants that naturally repel pests. For example, marigolds may protect beans and tomatoes from insects.

Controlling Weeds

Over large areas:

Cover the area with plastic for 4 to 6 weeks during warm weather. This will kill weed roots and seeds beneath the surface.

Between hard surfaces:

Pour boiling water over weeds growing between paving stones.

Practice natural lawn care

A healthy, well-maintained lawn is the best defense against weeds and pests.

Build healthy soil

Grass grows best on healthy soil. It is worth spending time on soil quality because it is the backbone of a healthy lawn. Once your lawn is established, grasscycling (leaving grass clippings on the lawn when you mow) is another way to add organic matter to the soil and reduce the amount of organic matter sent to the local landfill. It also saves time. A lawn with a healthy, biologically active community within it, will circulate air and reduce thatch. Too much use of soluble, synthetic nitrogen fertilizers harms populations of beneficial soil organisms; increases thatch (a layer of dead grass); decreases soil pH, and leads to turf diseases as well as rapid shoot growth. More frequent mowing exhausts a plant's carbohydrate reserves.

In the lawn:

Remove the odd weed by hand. Remove as much of the root as possible to prevent re-growth. Try applying corn gluten meal on grass to prevent the emergence of annual weeds such as dandelions.

Mow high, mow often

If you mow when grass is high, you encourage your lawn to develop a deeper root system as well as tolerate heat, drought, shade, pests and disease. Raise your lawn mower to a height of 7.5 cm (3 inches). A dull mower blade can tear and damage grass leaving it susceptible to pests and disease. Sharpen mower blades regularly.

Water deeply but infrequently

Frequent, light watering creates a lawn with shallow roots. Over-watering can leach nutrients from grass, promote some weeds and starve grass roots of oxygen. Give your lawn the right amount of water. Most lawns only require 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water per week (or one hour of watering). Avoid watering in the evening as this leaves grass wet for longer, increasing risk of disease. If a lush lawn is not important to you - let it go dormant during the summer months.

Prevent pests naturally

A healthy lawn is less susceptible to weeds and damage by pests. Always plant more than one species of grass, because species differ in their ability to adapt to local conditions, tolerate disease and survive attack by pests. Re-seed any area affected by environmental stress and remove the source. If weeds persist, ask your local garden centre about how to test the pH of your soil. You should ensure the pH of your soil is between 6.0 and 7.0 (add agricultural lime to raise pH, peat moss or sulphur to lower it). There are many non-toxic alternatives to pesticides, such as soap mixtures, borax, acetic acid (vinegar), and corn gluten.

