LAWN MANAGEMENT

DEFINITION

Lawns are typically mono-cultures of turfgrass. They require special attention that involves a regimen of tasks to keep it looking healthy and enjoyable. They provide a place for you and your family to play, relax, and enjoy.

The objective is to have a lawn that absorbs rainwater and does not harm local water bodies with over-application of fertilizers and chemicals.

In order to have a lawn that has a low impact on the environment, choosing the appropriate type of turfgrass along with proper lawn management is very important. For further info see the **10** core practices for urban nutrient management and bay-friendly lawns. Click —»

BEFORE

Patchy or Dead Spots

Thin, Short, Bare, & Weedy

AFTER

Uniform, Proper Cut Height

EXAMPLES

Bermuda grass

Tall fescue grass

Lawn Types

Cool season

These lawns consist of grasses that grow straight up. Fescues, Colonial bent, and perennial ryes are a few examples. These lawns will require more water during extended periods of heat during summer months. Establish or overseed in Late Spring to Mid-Summer.

Cool-season grasses

- Tall Fescue
- Kentucky Bluegrass
- Fine Leaf Fescues
- Perennial Rye

Seedling or recently established lawns within a year have very low drought tolerance. Establishing a lawn at the appropriate time optimizes root growth and reduces needed irrigation.

Warm season

These lawns consist of grasses that creep along the ground. Bermuda, Zoysia, and St. Augustine are a few examples. These lawns do well with minimal water during summer months and go dormant (TURN BROWN) during the winter season. If you do not like the looks of dormant grass, You can overseed during the winter with annual rye. Establish or overseed in Spring or Late Summer to Early Fall.

Warm-season grasses

- Bermuda
- Zoysia
- Centipede
- St. Augustine

No-mow

For those who have allergies, the shaded bare patch, or other reasons for not being able to care for a large lawn a no-mow approach may be better suited for your lifestyle. The approach is to select alternative short growing mat-forming plants that will take the place of turf grasses. Examples of these are clovers, phlox, and sedums. See the Plant List for more options.

The no-mow approach is a good way to compliment the Conservation Landscape Home Project.

Fun Fact: Water makes up **75**% - **85**% of a healthy grass plant.

LAWN AERATION

Aeration involves the removal of small soil plugs or cores out of the lawn. This can be done mechanically or by hand tool with the primary intent to alleviate compacted soils. Holes are **1-6** inches deep with a spacing of **2-6** inches apart depending on the severity of compaction and condition of the lawn.

Why aerate:

- Breaks up thatch layer.
- Allows for extra water, nutrients, and air to reach the roots of the grass.
- Gets more food for soil microorganisms that benefit the lawn.
- Loosens overly compacted areas for better absorption.

When to aerate:

- Take a sample (refer to the soil test)
- The lawn is heavily used or driven on.
- Thatch layer is greater than **1/2** inch thick.
- Have heavy clay or construction soils.

When not to aerate:

- Newly seeded or sodded lawns within the first year.
- Lightly used lawns- Seasonal freeze/ thaw cycles and earthworm activity will loosen soils naturally.

DEEPER ROOTS = BETTER DROUGHT TOLERANCE = LESS IRRIGATION

Timing:

- Cool season lawns such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass- Late August to mid September.
- Warm season lawns such as bermudagrass and zoysiagrass- During June and July.
- Can be aerated once a year under heavy use or less frequently under light use.

Where to get an aerator:

- Contact your local rental center or garden center.
- Contact your local lawn or landscape companies for service.

DE-THATCHING

Thatch is the layer of dead grass blades and clippings that collect on the surface of the soil. This layer over time decomposes and forms a thick layer that prevents water from quickly being absorbed into the soil. During heavy rain events, a thick layer of dry thatch will increase the amount of water leaving your lawn and collecting in the storm drain. In-turn increasing water demand and creating an environment for fungal diseases and pests.

Perform de-thatching by hand tool or machine annually or as needed. The practice of aeration also helps to break up the thatch layer. These two practices can be used in conjunction or alternated from season to season.

GETTING STARTED

The cost of lawn management project is determined by what you have exising or are looking to establish as new lawn. Here are a few questions to ask before you start: If you can do the tilling and seeding? Which type of lawn do you want and will it need irriagtion? Is your existing lawn full of weeds, unlevel and holding water in some areas?

DO IT YOURSELF (DIY)

If you intend to perform this work yourself, see the lists for general tools and materials you may need to help you get started.

Tools & Materials:

- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Lawn Mower
- Seed, sod, sprigs or plugs
- Spreaders and sprayers
- Fertilizer
- String trimmer
- Leaf blower
- Shears
- Wheelbarrow
- Rake
- Aerator
- Rain Gauge
- Hose, sprinkler or Irrigation System

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TURF SELECTION

See the chart below to help determine the type of lawn to establish.

Cool-Season Grasses	Seed	Sod	Sprigs	Plugs
Kentucky bluegrass	Yes	Yes	No	No
Tall fescue	Yes	Yes	No	No
When to plant	Spet. **1** to Oct. **15** or Feb. & March	Anytime soil is not frozen		
Warm-Season Grasses	**Seed**	**Sod**	**Sprigs**	**Plugs**
*Bermudagrass	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
*Zoysiagrass	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Perennial ryegrass	Yes	No	No	No
When to plant	Late May to Mid Aug	Late May to Mid Aug	Late May to Mid July	Late May to Mid July

*some varieties can only be established vegetatively, not by seed.

HIRE OUT THE WORK

Contact any licensed and bonded landscape or site contractor. Prices will vary on amount of area to be worked and turf selection.

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SEED, SOD & LOW PLANTS

See your local landscape supply or hardware store for seed and sod. Your local nursery will carry low growing plants if trying to achieve a no-mow lawn.

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MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Watering
A general practice is to ensure most turf-grasses get approximately **1** inch of water per week either by rainfall or irrigation.
Use a method of measurement to track the amount of water your lawn receives.

- Rain Gauge
- Small Container or Shallow Lid
- Rain Sensor
- Soil Moisture Sensor

A watering depth of **4** inches is ideal so that roots grow deep into the soil. To be most effective and reduce runoff, watering may need to be done in multiple cycles over a couple of days.

Apply water early in the morning around sunrise to reduce evaporation loss, allow the grass to absorb, and allowing blades to air-dry.

Over-watering leads to:

- Excess blade growth
- Summer fungal diseases
- More frequent mowing
- Water wasting
- Runoff of fertilizer and pesticide into local waterways

Thirsty lawns will show "foot-printing" when walked on due to the grass blades lack of spring back. This is a sign of wilting and lack of water.

Newly seeded or sodded lawns will need more water for the first **3-4** weeks.

Browning
Severe drought or excessive heat may cause some cool-season grasses to die or go dormant until conditions become favorable again. Similar for warm-season grasses going dormant during the winter season due to cold temperatures.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES - CONT.

Mowing
Cutting the grass blades at the right height impacts the overall health of the lawn. This promotes deeper root growth and shading of the soil to reduce evaporation.

- Maintain Cool-season Grasses at **2.5** - **3** inches tall.
- Maintain Warm-season Centipede grass at **2** - **2.5** inches tall.
- Maintain Warm-season Bermuda and Zoysia at **1** - **1.5** inches tall.

Pro Tip: Keep mover blade sharp for a clean cut, not tearing.

Fertilizer
Late summer or early fall is the ideal application time. Avoid large spring applications as this promotes heavy growth during summer season. Reduce or eliminate fertilizer. If you choose to fertilize, adopt a reduced rate or apply less than a pound of Nitrogen per **1000** square feet per application. Maximize your use of slow-release N fertilizer. Sweep off any fertilizer that lands on a paved surface and never apply fertilizer within **15** to **20** feet of water body.

Pro Tip: Take a soil sample annually. This way you know what to buy, how much to apply, and don't pollute local waterways.

Fungicide & Pesticide
Only use if needed, for specific issues, and follow directions on package. Over broadcasting and overuse of these chemicals stay in your soil and end up in local waterways.

Sprinkler Systems
Avoid watering roads, sidewalks, driveways and other hard surfaces. Rain and soil sensors can reduce watering by **50** -**75**% by water only when needed.
Monitor the forecast - Don't irrigate when it is raining.
Use the appropriate spray nozzle for the watering task to reduce water loss.

Weeds
Try to avoid using weed killer. With a good, dense lawn cover, the lawn should crowd out the weeds. If you do need to use weed killers, read labels when applying weed killers as your desired grass may be in one of these categories and susceptible to the chemicals used.

The categories of weed killers are:

- Selective
- Non-selective
- Pre-emergent
- Post-emergent
- Wetting Agents

The **5** groups of weeds to look for in your lawn are:

- Broadleaf
- Grassy
- Sedges
- Poa Anna
- Common Bermuda

Project Completion!

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