

## Organic Lawn Care Calendar—Quick Reference

Growth Cycle	Cultural Practice	Pests	Soil Amendments
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Late Winter</b></p> <p><i>Feb — Early Mar</i> Grass is dormant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharpen mower blades</li> <li>• Test Soil</li> </ul>		<p>Do not apply nutrients or organic matter during this period.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Early Spring</b></p> <p><i>Mar 15-Apr 15</i> Early root activity begins.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove winter debris</li> <li>• Overseed weedy or thin areas</li> <li>• De-thatch if thatch is greater than 1/2 inch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suppress weed germination with corn gluten. Apply just before the forsythia blooms and delay any overseeding or aeration.</li> </ul>	<p>Corn gluten also acts as a high-nitrogen fertilizer.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mid to late Spring</b></p> <p><i>Apr 15– June 15</i> Rapid shoot growth and slowing of root growth. There is high carbohydrate use by the grass to increase leaf area; carbohydrates are taken out of root storage during this period.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overseed weedy or thin areas</li> <li>• Aerate</li> <li>• Add soil amendments</li> <li>• First mowing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suppress crabgrass by mowing high</li> <li>• Pull out dandelions when they are blooming</li> </ul>	<p>Apply organic nutrients, minerals, or lime as indicated by soil test. If soil has less than 5% organic matter, is damaged by chemicals and is compacted, then use 1/4-1/2 inch compost.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Summer</b></p> <p><i>Jun 15-Aug 15</i> Shoot and root growth slows. Grass most susceptible to insects, disease and damage from heavy foot traffic. The grass uses the carbohydrates stored in the spring.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue mowing at 3 inches</li> <li>• Apply compost tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White grubs can be controlled with beneficial nematodes</li> <li>• Compost tea may help to correct the causes of disease, weed and insect problems</li> </ul>	<p>Apply compost tea every 2 weeks. Compost tea can be made by putting two shovelfuls of compost in a burlap bag. Tie the bag closed and place in a barrel of water for two weeks.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Late Summer</b></p> <p><i>Aug 15-Sep 15</i> Shoot and root growth both resume as temperatures decrease.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue mowing at 3 inches</li> <li>• Seed new or renovated lawn</li> <li>• Reseed thin spots</li> <li>• Apply organic fertilizers</li> </ul>		<p>Apply organic fertilizer if recommended on the soil test taken in the spring.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Early to mid Fall</b></p> <p><i>Sept 15-Nov 1</i> Shoot growth slows but root growth continues to active.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaf shredding and removal</li> <li>• Aerate soil</li> <li>• Last mowing</li> </ul>		<p>Apply lime as indicated by soil test. Leaving shredded leaves on the lawn add vital nutrients to the soil.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Winter</b></p> <p><i>Nov—Feb</i> Grass is dormant.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoy a rest</li> <li>• Start planning a garden</li> <li>• Peruse the seed catalogs and dream of the perfect ecological landscape</li> </ul>		<p>Do not apply nutrients or organic matter during this period.</p>

# Organic Lawn Care Calendar Details

## Sharpen Mower Blades

Make sure your mower blades are sharpened at the beginning of the season. Bad mowing practices cause more problems than any other cultural practices. Mowing with a dull blade makes the grass susceptible to disease.

## Soil Test

Before making any decisions, have the soil tested. The UConn extension service will test your soil for \$8.00 per sample. Their number is 486-6271. The soil test will tell you how much nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and lime (pH) your soil needs to grow grass. Let them know that you want to use *organic methods* so that they can adjust their recommendations. March is a good time to test the soil, as the service gets very busy in April. What you add to the soil throughout the season should be based on the soil test results.

## Seeding

Reseed weedy or bare patches in the spring. The best time to renovate or start a new lawn is late August and September after most of the weed seeds have sprouted. Make sure the soil surface stays moist while the seeds are germinating. Seed when the forecast is calling for steady light rain (but not a downpour!)

Grass varieties differ enormously in their resistance to certain pests, tolerance to climatic conditions, growth habit and appearance. A grass mix is much more resilient than one type of grass. Plant a mix of cold and drought tolerant fescues. Kentucky Bluegrass is not appropriate for Connecticut's climate. Until the 1950s, clover was included in lawn seed mixes for its soft texture and ability to contribute nitrogen to the soil. Then the American lawn industry began promoting pesticide use and encouraged the public to view clover as a weed. Many plants considered weeds – such as Veronica and violets are actually listed in wildflower books. Clover is a beneficial plant that takes free nitrogen from the air and distributes it to the grass, which helps grass grow. Clover roots are extensive and extremely drought resistant, providing significant resources to soil organisms, and staying green long after turf goes naturally dormant. Consider including Dutch White Clover in the seed mix. *Check the weed content of the grass seed and that there are no pesticide coatings.* One local source of fescue seed mixes is the Hart Seed Company in Meriden, CT. Their number is 860-529-2537. Another source is Fedco Seed, ME. Their website is [www.fedcoseeds.com](http://www.fedcoseeds.com)

## De-thatching

Thatch is a dense layer of grass stems and roots on the soil surface – primarily caused by excessive chemical fertilization, pesticide use, frequent shallow watering and mowing short. Some thatch is normal but if the soil is deficient in soil organisms, the thatch does not break down fast enough. When thatch is ½" or more, it can prevent roots from establishing, making grass susceptible to insects and disease. Power raking, renting a de-thatcher or aerator will help to break it down. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn does not cause thatch.

## Aerating

Aerate compacted soil. Compaction is an invitation for weeds. Aerating removes plugs of soil, allows air, water and nutrients to reach the roots of the grass. If you can not stick a screwdriver easily into your soil, it is too compacted. Get together with your neighbors and rent an aerator. Once you have an established, healthy lawn, worms and birds pecking at your soil will aerate it for free.

## Soil Amendments

Add soil amendments only as recommended on the soil test. Compost is an ideal soil amendment, adding the much-needed organic content to your soil and suppressing many grass pathogens. Compost has the benefit of helping to neutralize the soil (ideal soil pH is 6.3 to 6.8) and holding nutrients and water while adding many beneficial soil microorganisms. After aerating and de-thatching, spread 1/4 inch layer of organic compost over your lawn. Leaf compost from the Town transfer station is another option. Alfa meal is also an excellent organic fertilizers. Corn gluten also acts as a high-nitrogen organic fertilizer as well as a weed suppressant. Apply fertilizer and soil amendments before a forecast of steady rain (but not a downpour). If there is a dense mat of thatch, then de-thatch the lawn before applying fertilizer so that it can get into the root zone.

Nitrogen, the most abundant nutrient in lawn fertilizers promotes color and growth. Adding too much nitrogen, or quick release synthetic fertilizers, will result in quicker growth and the need for more mowing. Too much nitrogen can also weaken the grass, alter the pH, and promote disease, insect and thatch build-up. If applied too early or late nutrients can leach directly into nearby surface waters. Organic fertilizers feed your grass slowly and more evenly than chemical fertiliz-

ers.

Grass clippings contain 58% of the nitrogen added from fertilizers, improve soil conditions, suppress disease, and reduce thatch and crabgrass. Leave the clippings on your lawn.

A few fertilizers, such as Ringer® Lawn Restore®, are certified by the Organic Materials Review Institute ([www.saferbrand.com](http://www.saferbrand.com)). North Country Organics has a number of natural fertilizers, including phosphorus-free fertilizers for lawns close to fresh water bodies ([www.norganics.com](http://www.norganics.com)). Other choices include Peaceful Valley Farm Supply ([www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)), Down To Earth's Bio-Turf ([www.downtoearthdistributors.com](http://www.downtoearthdistributors.com)), and Harmony Farm ([www.harmonyfarm.com](http://www.harmonyfarm.com)).

### Mowing

For the first and last mowing, mow down to 2 inches to prevent fungal problems. For the rest of the year keep it at 3 inches to shade out weeds and foster deep, drought-resistant roots. Short grass promotes shallow roots, weeds and thatch. Keeping your grass high shades out weeds and protects your lawn against drought. Leave the grass clipping on the lawn – this provides 58% of the nutrients your lawn needs. If grass clippings are in clumps on the lawn, either cross-cut to evenly disperse them or move them to the compost pile.



### Watering

Established lawns—By planting drought tolerant grasses and encouraging deep root growth, your organic lawn should be able to let Nature do the watering. Frequent, shallow watering encourages Japanese beetle grub infestation, fungus, thatch, and root rot. With watering deep and mowing high, the roots will be able to withstand summer's dryness. Grass naturally goes dormant with dry summer weather. If it looks brown, it is not dead, just dormant, and does not need watering. Once it rains, it will become green.

New lawns —Newly sprouted grass will require an inch of water per week. If not provided by Nature, then water in the early morning. To prevent over watering, place tuna fish cans or other straight-sided containers on your lawn; turn on the sprinklers and check the time. When most of the containers have one inch of water in them, turn off the water and check how long it ran. This will tell you how long to run the water each week.

### Leaves

Mow over leaves to shred them. Leave them on the lawn—they will quickly decompose. Leaves are an important nutrient addition to the soil. During the peak leaf drop, the leaves may need to be moved to the compost pile. Consider using alternative shade-loving plants in areas where leaf drop is dense.

### Pests

Crabgrass—To suppress crabgrass, keep the lawn grass at a height of 3 1/2 to 4 inches high during crabgrass germination period—when soil temperatures reach 60 degrees for at least a week.

Dandelions – Pull them out when at their weakest – when they are blooming – by digging out 4-5 inches of the root. This may have to be done a few times throughout the season. Be sure to at least pluck the flowers before they go to seed. A dandelion infestation may indicate a high pH. Refer to the soil test. Add sulfur to bring the soil to 6.3-6.8

White grubs – can be controlled with beneficial nematodes (natural microscopic parasites). Summer is the best time to use.

Weeds—Corn gluten can be used as a pre-emergent weed suppressant. The best time to use is in early spring, before weeds germinate (before the forsythia bloom). Weeds in driveways and sidewalk cracks can be controlled with boiling water or with white vinegar.