



Spring and Fall Natural Lawn Care Guide

Why Garden Naturally?

Improving the overall health of your lawn is an effective way to keep your yard vibrant and reduce incidence of pests and disease. A healthy lawn is naturally resilient, helping eliminate your need for chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

Lawn and garden chemicals can be hazardous to your family and toxic to your pets and aquatic animals, including salmon. Many chemicals persist on your lawn for days, weeks, even months, and are often tracked into your home and runoff to local waterways when it rains. Pesticides also kill beneficial insects and soil microbes, disrupting the ecological balance of your lawn and garden.

Spring and Fall Lawn Maintenance Tips:

The best defense is a good offense: Enriching your soil with compost, removing thatch when needed, and occasionally aerating and reseeding your lawn eliminates the need for fertilizer and weed killers.

1. De-thatch

In spring or fall, remove thatch from your lawn. If done thoroughly, thatch only needs to be removed every couple of years. Thatch is the accumulation of dead grass in your lawn. Thatch can form an impenetrable mat keeping water, air and nutrients from reaching the roots of your grass. Remove thatch with a regular garden rake, a specialized de-thatching rake, or by renting a tool from your local home improvement store or equipment shop.



De-thatching rakes are sold at home improvement stores and garden centers for around \$20.

2. Aerate

Aerate in spring or fall. Aerating allows more air, water and nutrients to penetrate the soil and get to grass roots. Compact soil doesn't drain well, and can lead to moss and chronically unhealthy grass. If your soil is compacted, aerate once a year for the first couple/few years. As your soil improves, you can aerate less. Aerate your lawn using a power aerator you can rent from a local home improvement or equipment rental shop, or purchase a manual aerator for smaller lawns. Aerating removes plugs of soil from your lawn and deposits them on the surface, which brings beneficial microbes to the surface. Leave the plugs on the lawn to break down on their own.



Manual aerators are sold at home improvement stores and garden centers for around \$20.

3. Re-seed

After de-thatching, you are likely to notice bare spots in your lawn. Apply a layer of grass seed to your entire lawn, and especially to those bald spots to thicken your turf and out-compete moss and weeds. Use a seed mix specially formulated for the Pacific Northwest climate. Cover the seeds with compost or straw to keep birds from eating the seed and to increase germination. Compost will also act as a fertilizer for the new seed and your existing grass. If you don't use compost as your fertilizer, add a natural, slow release fertilizer after re-seeding.

Pacific Northwest seed mixes are sold at home improvement stores and garden centers for \$10-\$20.



4. Use compost or a slow release fertilizer

In spring and/or fall, top-dress your lawn with fine compost about a quarter-inch deep to provide a slow release of nitrogen. Rake in compost until grass tips poke through. Compost adds organic material to the soil, allowing for better water retention, drainage, airflow and food for beneficial soil microbes and also acts as a starter material for new grass seed. If you choose to add more fertilizer, fall is the best time to give your lawn a boost by using an organic slow-release fertilizer. Avoid quick release/liquid fertilizers that will runoff and cause water pollution.

For more information on natural fertilizers, check out our Natural Products Guide at GreshamOregon.gov/Watershed. To determine how much compost you need, multiply your lawn dimensions by .02 ft. Ex: .02 ft x 20ft x 100ft – this will give you cubic feet of compost needed to cover your lawn with ¼ inch.



Compost can be purchased in bags at home improvement stores and garden centers, or can be purchased in bulk and delivered from landscaping supply companies.

5. Weed Control: Skip the pre-emergent herbicides and weed and feed

Synthetic weed killers are often hazardous to people, pets, bees, birds, fish and other aquatic organisms. In particular, pre-emergent herbicides persist in the environment for a long time, increasing the likelihood of negative effects. Combination products like weed and feed contain pesticide *and* fertilizers. Why apply herbicide to your entire lawn for only a few weeds, or apply fertilizer when you only need a weed-killer? Using one product at a time reduces unintended pollution. Leaving your grass clippings on your lawn and raking in compost once per year alleviates the need for additional fertilizer.

6. Alternative Weed Controls:

Some weeds are beneficial! For example, clover makes nitrogen available to your grass. Use specialized tools or hand removal whenever possible, especially, in spring and fall when the soil is damp. Mow high (2-3 inch setting) but regularly to keep seed heads from developing. You can spot-spray weeds a few times with concentrated vinegar (it may take a few doses to kill them) which is less toxic than synthetic formulations. Flame-weeders are an interesting tool for management of pathways, garden rows, patios and driveways.



Weed removal tools like this “weed hound” can be purchased at home improvement stores or garden centers for around \$20.

7. I Still Need a Product:

If you determine that you need more than manual, mechanical and mowing as a control for weeds or other pests, check out our guide to natural gardening products: GreshamOregon.gov/Watershed and the Grow Smart, Grow Safe Guide for Chemicals to choose the least toxic product you need for your problem.

8. **Safe Disposal:** Dispose of unused toxic lawn and garden chemicals safely at a Metro hazardous waste facility at 6161 NW 61st Ave, Portland; or 2001 Washington St., Oregon City. Call 503-234-3000 or visit <http://oregonmetro.gov/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=571> for more information.

For more resources, visit our website at: GreshamOregon.gov/Watershed