

# **Green With Envy**

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What is the most prized part of your yard or landscape? The answer most people would say is 'their lawn'. It seems that there is a certain silent competition on the street or in the neighbourhood to have the best luxurious lawn. People go to great lengths to have that perfect carpet of green, spending hundreds of dollars in fertilizers and enviro-friendly products and countless of hours in raking, mowing and trimming. But a simple natural lawn can also be the envy of any neighbourhood.

The techniques used to grow beautiful flowers, healthy shrubs and nutritious vegetables can easily be translated to turf care. We should focus on promoting a biological diversity in the soil beneath our turf grasses rather than concentrating on what miracle chemical we can apply on top of the grass.

A natural healthy lawn grows in soil that is alive and whose roots can reach deeper, thanks to a large number of insects, spiders, earthworms and micro-organisms. All of these organisms form the soil food web and play an important role in maintaining soil health and support plant growth. They help mix organic material with mineral matter throughout the soil, while creating air pockets and channels for water and air to move down in the soil. These organisms also digest organic material and assist in the cycling of nutritive elements that plants can use and ensure that these nutrients are retained in the root zone.

A natural healthy lawn doesn't stress as easily in extremely hot or cold weather. It also doesn't need watering as often because the soil and all of its organic matter holds on to water better. When you do water, apply at least 2.5cm or 1 inch of water, according to the need rather than on a set schedule. Early morning is the ideal time for watering as this minimizes water lost through evaporation and wind. Infrequent and deep watering will promote strong deep roots. Excessive watering fills up air spaces in the soil and reduces oxygen supply for the roots. This can also lead to poor growing conditions and disease problems. A healthy natural lawn can survive several weeks in a dormant state. In extended hot dry periods, it may wilt, turn brown and become inactive but will green up again when regular moisture conditions return.

A natural lawn doesn't require feeding every week or two, and most natural lawns only require one to two feedings per year. You may want to give your lawn a spring feeding with a commercial fertilizer with a higher first number (represents nitrogen) in the formula to promote leaf growth. Some people feed their lawns in the fall to prepare it for the winter. Avoid over-fertilization as this causes an imbalance in the nutrients for organisms and may decrease their populations. Compost is a great fertilizer that will add organic matter to your lawn, supplying both major and secondary nutrients needed for healthy plant growth. The grass clippings are a great source of slow-released nitrogen for the grass and humus for the soil. Make sure these clippings are not too thick of a layer to avoid smothering the grass. If you have an abundance of clippings add them to your compost pile or mix them in your flower and vegetable gardens.

A natural healthy lawn should be mowed at a height of 6-8cm or 2.5 to 3 inches. This height will develop a deep, extensive root system, grow thicker and will better retain soil moisture. In hot weather, this height of grass will also shade the roots and keep them cool. It is always a good practice to mow your lawn when it is dry. Sharpen your mower blade in the spring and keep it sharp. Grass can recover more quickly and easily from one clean cut rather than many tears from a dull blade.

Applying these ideas will certainly help you in achieving a natural and healthy lawn as well as possibly be the envy of the neighbourhood,