

notes from the garden

ORGANIC LAWN CARE

Organic lawn care is more than just changing the brand of fertilizer that you use – it is an understanding that we cannot control but rather must encourage nature. Create a healthy, fertile, well-drained soil and your lawn will flourish. Select the proper grasses. Not all insects are pests. Troublesome weeds hate healthy organic lawns and there are simple, safe, organic solutions to diseases should they arise. By becoming aware of every action you take, you can have a lawn that will require minimal care, will be beautiful, and will be environmentally safe for you, your children and your pets to play barefoot in the grass.



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Aeration Have you ever noticed how green and healthy the grass looks in the spots where trenches were dug to lay sprinkler pipes even weeks after a new sprinkler system has been installed? Why? Air has been added to compacted soil. **Air contains oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen and other minerals that are essential for plant roots to develop and for the many beneficial soil microorganisms to do their job – decompose organic matter.**

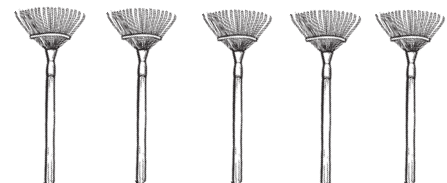
The easiest way to “aerate” is to **apply Bio-Inoculant**. This product contains live microbes. When applied with compost or with an organic fertilizer, *Bio-Inoculant's* microbial activity mellows and aerates the soil. We call this “liquid aeration”.

Add Organic Matter, i.e. Fertilizers If your lawn is in decline and you need to “jump start” the organic process, begin by **applying ½ to 1 inch of compost** (or humic acid at 5-7 pounds per 1000 square feet), as well as 40 pounds of lava sand, 20 pounds of Texas greensand and 5 pounds of molasses per 1000 square feet. To begin a regular fertilization program, apply *Redenta's Organic Fertilizer* at the rate of 20 pounds per 1000 square feet three times a year (February, June and October). Foliar feed, starting in February, every two months with a mixture of *Garrett Juice* or *Bioform* (4 tablespoons per gallon) and *Agrispon* (1 teaspoon per gallon) for each 1000 square feet. Remember to always

foliar feed early in the morning or late in the evening (avoid the hot afternoon sun).

Mowing Mow often (at least weekly). Summer grasses should be **cut no lower than 2 ½ inches**; 3 ½ to 4 inches would be even better. Use a **mulching mower** – this will add organic matter to the soil and save you a lot of work. *Hint: Keeping the lawn mowed frequently in the early spring is an effective tool in preventing weed seeds from forming.*

Watering One inch of water a week is recommended for most of our heavy clay soils in North Texas in as few waterings as possible. Frequent watering encourages shallow roots and unhealthy



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grass. Slowly increase the duration of your watering and decrease the frequency. Learn how your sprinkler system works. Place rain gauges or tuna cans with 1" marked on the inside and find out how long it really takes for your sprinkler system to provide 1 inch of water at various places in your yard – you will be surprised at the differences. Those gardeners with sandy soils may have to water more – as much as 1½ inches a week. Remember to take into account the rain nature provides – that counts too!

Weeds, etc. Relax! One man's weed is another man's flower. And, if you faithfully follow our organic practices you will develop a healthy lawn and weeds really will disappear. In the meanwhile, hand weeding is still the best technique – and great exercise! You can spot treat with 10% (or better yet 20%) vinegar on hot, sunny days (not as effective in sandy soils).

Corn gluten meal is an effective organic pre-emergent herbicide (and a high nitrogen fertilizer). It prevents the roots of newly sprouted broadleaf and grass seeds from forming. Application (at 20 pounds per 1000 square feet) is best done in the early spring (February 15 – March 15) and again in the early fall (September 15 – October 15). Water it in well and then hold off on watering for a couple of weeks.

One of the best ways of not seeing those nasty spring weeds is to overseed in October with perennial rye at 7-10 pounds per 1000 square feet. Mow your grass short and top-dress bare areas with ½ inch of compost to give the seed a base to grow on. You will be adding organic matter to your soil, you will have a lush green lawn all winter long and whatever weeds that do manage to grow you will not notice because your lawn will be green! Remember not to apply corn gluten meal if you plan to overseed – it will prevent the germination of the rye seed.

Grass burs can be eliminated by applying humic acid (5-7 pounds per 1000 square feet) in the fall and corn gluten meal (20 pounds per 1000 square feet) around March 1st. Continue with our dedicated organic program – grass burs love poor soils.

Other Problems Fungal diseases such as brown patch (large circular areas of grass that turn brown and die) are quite commonly caused by overwatering, poor drainage and excessive nitrogen. Correct those habits, clean up the dead grass and top-dress with ½ inch of compost.

Apply corn meal at 20 pounds per 1000 square feet.

Gray leaf spot in St. Augustine can be cured by a baking soda or better yet, a potassium bicarbonate spray (1 rounded tablespoon of either per gallon of water). Top-dress with ½ inch of compost.

Bad Bugs Grubworms (C-shaped, fat, white larvae of the June bug) sometimes do eat the roots of grass to a point that the turf can be easily lifted from the lawn. But they are seldom a real problem in a healthy organic lawn; they are just busy feeding on decomposing material. If you have more than ten to a square foot area, treat with beneficial nematodes while the grubs are still present. Water the soil well before and after application for best results. Clean up the dead grass and top-dress with ½ inch of compost.

Chinch bugs suck plant sap and cause grass to turn yellow during hot, dry summers. These tiny 1/6" dark pests smell bad, especially when stepped on. Dust affected area with diatomaceous earth or spray area with orange oil (2 ounces/gallon) and Garrett Juice or Bioform. Clean up any dead grass and top-dress with ½ inch of compost. Check to make sure those parts of the lawn are receiving adequate water.

Fertilization Schedule

Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
G				G				G
F		F		F		F		F

G = Granular

F = Foliar

If you're having difficulty finding the time to stay on top of your fertilization program, Redenta's does have an organic fertilization service that takes care of the granular and foliar fertilization chores for you. Call us at metro 817.469.6786 for a free estimate.