

**FREE! Take one!**

# GROWING A HEALTHY LAWN

To maintain an attractive lawn, you don't need to rely on chemical pesticides. In fact, preventing lawn problems is usually much easier than trying to treat them after they start.

The Nova Scotia government has approved the *Non-essential Pesticides Control Act*. Beginning in the spring of 2011, the act will restrict the use and sale of lawn care pesticides in the province except for those on an allowable list. The list will be available on our website by the spring of 2011.



## TIPS FOR THE BEST DEFENCE AGAINST WEEDS AND PESTS

### **Mix that grass**

Grow a lawn with more than one type of grass, such as using Kentucky bluegrass mixed with fescues. Lawns with mixed grass are more tolerant to

- different growing conditions such as shady and sunny areas or dry slopes
- invading insects, fungi, or disease

### **Take just a little off the top**

Cut grass to a height of 5–8 centimetres (about 2–3 inches). Maintaining the grass at this height

- lets it develop a deep root system and create a dense thick lawn
- makes it more tolerant of drought and better able to compete against weeds

### **Avoid a fast food diet**

Lawns use nutrients in the soil to stay healthy and resist damage so use the right fertilizer to keep the grass fed.

- Replace nutrients by leaving grass clippings on the lawn, fertilizing with compost or other organic soil additives.
- Fertilize in April and May or in September, when the lawn is actively growing.
- Avoid using commercial fertilizers that advertise fast action or promise quick green-up which often result in soft, weak plants.
- Don't use too much fertilizer which will wash off the lawn and harm the environment.

## Let rain do the work

Lawns usually receive enough water from rain in all but the driest periods of the summer. A lawn needs water when footprints stay compressed for more than a few seconds and the grass fades to a dull greyish-green colour.

- Water just enough so that 25 mm (1 inch) covers the entire surface of the lawn.
- Set up a small rain gauge the first time to know when you've reached 25 mm, time it, and water for that length of time in the future.
- Water in the morning or evening to reduce evaporation.

## Sweeten sour soil

The acidity level of soil affects the amount of nutrients that plants can use.

- Test your soil—it should have a pH of 5.8–6.5.
- Check with your garden centre for a soil test kit or send a sample of soil to a soil laboratory.
- Add lime in the fall if you need to sweeten the soil—Maritime soil is often very acidic.

## Control those weeds

Weeds love lawns that are in poor condition. Weed seeds quickly germinate and grow in damaged areas where soil is compacted or grass is heavily damaged by insects and diseases.

- Re-seed bare or damaged patches quickly.
- Walk in different places to avoid compacting the soil or wearing bare spots in the grass.
- Build permanent foot paths to sheds and composting areas.

## Manage the thatch

All grasses form thatch, a layer of dead leaves and roots between the base of the living leaves and the surface of the soil.

- Thatch helps both cushion the growing grass and insulate the soil from high summer temperatures.
- Too much thatch reduces the amount of water and nutrients moving down to the roots and can shelter damaging insects and fungi.
- Remove excess thatch thicker than about 1 cm (1/2 inch) in the fall, using a hand rake or a mechanical de-thatcher.

## Tackle those stubborn problems

Some lawn problems just don't seem to want to go away and you might have to use a pesticide. First, figure out what's causing the problem. After you've correctly identified it, ask your garden centre to help you select a pesticide that has the least impact on human health and the environment. Starting in the spring of 2011, you can check the province's list of allowable pesticides.

You can also replace parts of your lawn with the following:

- a drought-tolerant garden
- a natural habitat garden
- a decorative rock garden

For more information, go to our website at [www.gov.ns.ca/nse/pests](http://www.gov.ns.ca/nse/pests)