



Going Natural...

From the Coalition for a Healthy Calgary Website: A Direction we can follow in Thunder Bay.

In your own residential or commercial yard, here are suggestions for having a beautiful, natural yard.

1) Keep your lawn lush and healthy

In the long-run, having grass only where you really use it on your yard, is a lower maintenance option and is generally best for the environment. Most yards have lawn though, so here are some natural landscaping practices for a great lawn:

a) Overseed

Overseeding is the practice of adding new grass seed to your lawn so it grows more thickly. Weeds are less likely to grow where the grass is thick. Planting types of grass that are strong and will grow well in Thunder Bay also helps to prevent weeds.

When to Overseed

Overseeding is **most effective when done in the Spring or in the Fall** when the weather is not hot and the tender grass seedlings will do well. If you overseed in May, June or September you will have to water daily for about 10 minutes (when it does not rain) to keep the seedlings moist so they will sprout.

Overseeding in **late Fall is the easiest way** to overseed. You need not water - just let the winter snows melt and encourage the seeds to sprout. With late Fall overseeding, you won't get quite as many seeds germinating as in Spring or early Fall.

It Usually Takes 2 - 4 Years for New Grass Types to Take Over

Generally **you need to overseed once a year for 2 - 4 years** for the hardier grass type to take over your lawn. Your grass will be thicker and greener during the process. If you want hardier grass types to establish sooner with overseeding, stop watering your lawn once the new seeds have sprouted and are a couple of inches high. The hardier grass types will then compete better with grass types that are probably in your lawn now (e.g. Kentucky Bluegrass). If you're in a hurry, you could overseed in the Spring and then again in the Fall.

Spread a Thin Layer of Compost to Overseed

Spread a 1 cm. or 1/4 inch layer of compost over your lawn first. Then use a seeder to spread the grass seed. A drop seeder will spread the seeds more accurately than a broadcast seeder. Spread half the seed you need in one direction back and forth over your lawn. Then spread the other half of your seed over your lawn by going back and forth in the other direction. Use the amount of grass seed recommended by the supplier.

Avoid using corn gluten for a month before overseeding. It will stop the seeds from sprouting.

b) Mow high (2 to 4 inches, 5 to 10 cm)

If you set your mower blade at a height of 5 - 10 cm. or 2 - 4 inches, your grass will be able to hold in more water and will grow more lushly.

c) Leave clippings on your lawn

Leave your mower clippings on your lawn to provide nutrition to your lawn and help it hold in water. If you have healthy soil, with lots of micro-organisms, these clippings will decompose. If they don't decompose within a month, consider spreading some quality compost on your lawn to add micro-organisms.

d) Water wisely

When you water your lawn, put a small container out, and when it has collected 2.5 cm, or 1 inch of water, you will know you have watered enough. A frisbee will fill up to just the right amount of water. This amount of water will encourage your grass to grow deep roots so that it will be stronger and need less water and added nutrition.

If you have hardy grass types as your lawn, such as Sheep's Fescue, or if it has rained, you may not need to water. Otherwise, watering once a week is enough.

e) Aerate if needed

Aerate your lawn if the ground seems to be hard and compacted. To know if you have compacted soil, try shoving a screwdriver into your lawn. If it takes much force, you have compacted soil.

You can rent an aerator at an equipment rental outlet or hire a landscaping company to do it. Usually aeration is done in the spring. It can also be done in the fall. Aerating in the summer heat dries out your lawn.

Aeration machines cut little round plugs out of your lawn to allow water and air down to the roots. The plugs are left lying on your lawn and break down in a week or two. Plugs should be at least 5cm, or 2 inches, deep to be effective. Aerating the day after a rain or watering is often best as the ground is the right softness.

Rental aerators are quite big and heavy; you need a strong person to operate these machines. Hand spike aerators are often not as effective because they compact the soil at the end of the spikes.

After aeration is the ideal time to topdress your lawn with compost. The compost fills in the plug holes to go deeper into the soil.

2) Spread compost on your lawn and on your tree, shrub, and flower beds.

Spreading compost (decomposed organic matter) on your lawn and around your flowers, trees and shrubs will add a rich system of micro-organisms to your soil and improve the ability of your soil to provide nutrition to your plants. Compost itself is also a rich fertilizer.

Spread a layer of finished compost on the soil under your plants. You can do this regularly.

Spreading a thin layer of compost (1cm or 1/4 inch) over your lawn (topdressing) will add life to your lawn and it will need less water and fertilizer. Topdressing can be done anytime and is usually done once a year in the spring. If you aerate your lawn topdress right after aeration.

3) Remove weeds by digging

If you use the natural practices suggested here, your yard will be healthier, and you will likely have less weeds. Weeds are less likely to grow in rich, organic soils. Natural mulches prevent weeds from growing and weeds are easier to pull out of mulch than out of soil.

If you want no weeds, you will probably have to dig, and it's most effective with a good tool.

4) Use Eco-Sense or boiling water on weeds in sidewalk cracks

EcoSense is an acetic acid based eco-friendly herbicide available at Canadian Tire, Home Depot and other garden centers. It also has citric acid in the product to increase the effectiveness and speed of weed knock-down. If you spray EcoSense or pour boiling water, they will harm all the plants they touch. These methods are best used for weeds in sidewalk cracks or away from other desired plants. It usually takes a few applications over time to kill the weeds.

5) Accept some weeds

Accept and benefit from having some weeds. For example - dandelions are wonderful at aerating the soil with their deep tap roots. You can use young dandelion leaves in salads, or make dandelion wine.

Dandelion flowers are one of the first to bloom in the spring and support beneficial insects during that time when few other flowers are blooming.

If you let your weeds go to seed (flower and then produce seeds which spread), you will have more weeds. So accepting regular weeding as part of your routine (every few weeks), can keep weeds in check. And weeding just after weeds flower and before they go to seed, allows the insects to benefit AND prevents weed spread.

6) Spread corn gluten on your yard to prevent weeds

Corn gluten meal is made from corn. It is small granules that you can spread over your yard with a hand-held spreader or a fertilizer spreader.

Corn gluten prevents weed seeds from sprouting and is most useful when applied in the spring before weed seeds germinate. You can also apply corn gluten in the fall for some effect in the spring. Corn gluten is usually available in the spring and fall at garden centers and organic grocery stores. If you have extra (often

a bag will be enough for two applications), store it in a sealed container so that mice can't get at it.

If you overseed new grass seed on your lawn, or are planting other seeds, do not put corn gluten in these seeded areas, It will prevent your seeds from sprouting. About a month after your seeds have sprouted, you can then spread corn gluten.

7) Use natural methods for problem insects and fungus

Spraying trees and shrubs with a strong spray from your hose will knock off some insects, such as aphids.

Soap spray sprayed on plants will work against aphids, earwigs, mealy bugs, mites, sowfly larvae and white flies. Beneficial insects are not affected. Spray it on the plants from a hand spray bottle. You can purchase insecticidal soap at stores that sell gardening supplies. You can also make your own soap spray by mixing 1 tablespoon of dishwashing liquid in 2 litres of warm water. Add black tea, a teaspoon of citrus essential oil, or a teaspoon of peppermint extract to make your soap spray more effective.

Beer placed in an open saucer in your yard will attract and kill slugs.

Baking soda can be used to prevent and control fungal diseases. Mix 1 tablespoon of soda with a few drops of dish soap in a litre of water and spray it on your plants.

Thanks to www.pesticidefreeyards.org for the above information in point 7.

If you make your own compost, add a few crab shells or lobster shells to it (remove any meat or butter) near the beginning of the composting cycle or at least two weeks before applying the compost. This will encourage the growth of chitin-degrading micro-organisms in your compost. Chitin is what makes the exoskeleton shell of insects, as well as the shells of lobster and crabs. Then spread this compost where you have insect challenges. If insects sense that there are micro-organisms around that will eat their shells, they leave. Diatomaceous earth (ancient sea shells) is a product that also has a lot of chitin. It can be spread where there are insects with exoskeletons (almost all insects, including ants and aphids; it does not work with slugs) and they may leave. You can also add diatomaceous earth to your compost. (2)

8) Make sure your landscaping service uses no synthetic pesticides

If you hire a yard care company, ask if they have a pesticide-free option, and switch to that. If they do not, switch to one of the many other companies in Thunder Bay with pesticide-free options.

9) Use actively aerated compost tea to improve the health of your yard

Actively aerated compost tea is made by putting high quality compost in water and pumping lots of air through it for a day. The liquid is then a rich soup of soil microorganisms. When you spray this on your yard, the micro-organisms will multiply in your soil. This will increase the ability of your soil to provide nutrients to your plants. Each time you spray actively aerated compost tea your soil will get richer in organic life and this effect will last.

Spraying actively aerated compost tea on your grass, plants, trees, and shrubs will help them become healthier too.

Using actively aerated compost tea is the cheapest, easiest way to add organic matter and health to your yard.

10) Keep grassed areas to a minimum

Keeping grassed areas to a minimum will reduce your maintenance work and costs. It's usually hardest to deal with weeds in lawns.

Minimize grass to where it is used or needed most, for example: for children or pets to play on, or for picnics. Where you don't need grass, plant trees, shrubs, and perennial flowers (flowers that bloom every year) that grow well in Thunder Bay's cool climate. Cover the open areas around the plants with natural mulch (wood chips are probably best) to prevent weeds.

You can also have decks, patios, waterfalls, and other features instead of grass.

Source:

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Compost Tea

You can also buy ready-made bucket compost tea makers. One of the best is available in Canada at www.jollyfarmer.com (click on tea brewers) or call the Jolly Farmer in New Brunswick at 1-800-695-8300.

5 gallons is more than enough to cover an urban yard.

Remember, if making tea with chlorinated water, let it bubble with air for 2-3 hours so the chlorine evaporates before adding your compost. Using your own compost made from your yard waste is the best because you will be increasing the micro-organisms that live best in your yard. If you don't have your own compost, get a good quality compost that's made locally.

To spray your compost tea on your yard, you can use a backpack sprayer or a small sprayer found at local garden centres. Just make sure you get a big enough nozzle for fungal strands to pass through and so it doesn't clog (at least 35 mesh). You may need to get a new nozzle. Don't use a sprayer that has been used for spraying chemicals.

If you have a little sump pump (a clean one!) you can pump the tea through your garden hose on to your lawn, trees and shrubs. Spray the tops and bottoms of your plants' leaves as much as you

Weeding Tools

Many weeds can simply be pulled out by hand, especially when the ground is moist. All digging and drilling tools work best when the ground is moist, so it is best to weed after a rainfall or after watering (for up to a day or two afterwards).

Dandelions and thistles have deep tap roots (a root that goes straight down into the soil). These roots usually need to be dug out of the ground to at least 4 inches or 10 cm deep, or the plant will grow back.

It is best to throw weed seeds out in the garbage rather than in your compost, unless you know that your compost will heat to at least 130 degree fahrenheit to decompose the seeds.

Hand Digging Tools

These have a handle and a long metal prong (often the longer the better) with a fork at the end. Just push in beside the root and lever the prong back and forth to make a hole around the root and then pull or pry it out.

Step Digging Tools

These generally work well if the ground is moist. They tend to be easy on the back.

Standing upright you step on the pedal to push the prongs in around the root. Then you twist a few times in one direction and pull out a plug of soil with the root. If the ground is dry, you will only pull out about 2 inches or 5 cm. of root - usually not enough to stop it from growing back. When the ground is moist, enough of the root comes out to be effective.

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