
Courtesy Copy: It's Hot Hot Hot on our lawns

1 message

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Where the Grass is Greener:



Welcome to the Department of Environmental Protection's monthly newsletter about organic lawns and lawn care. Discover lawn care tips and tools, learn about life in the soil, and connect with us on environmental stewardship of land and water.

What's New?



To water or not to water--is that the question?

What a summer we have had--several weeks of drought followed by near-record rain. But how many sprinklers were still going off every day during all that rain?

Conserving water is not something many folks in our area worry about, but wasting it should be. Thirty percent of household water use in the U.S. is used outdoors, and half of that is for [watering lawns and gardens](#).

By that math, in Montgomery County, an estimated 7.5 million gallons of public water alone might be used on lawns and gardens annually! Much of this outdoor water is wasted through evaporation, runoff, leaks, or over watering.

A healthy organic lawn shouldn't even need additional watering, except when establishing new seed or during extended drought. Grass needs rest above ground to build strong roots below ground. If we force grass to stay green in the heat of summer, it won't have strong roots to green up again in the fall and survive harsh winter weather--and then we end up needing fertilizer to help it.

So while August might be hot, and grass might get dry and brown, turn off the taps and sprinklers and let it rest! Healthy grass can last several weeks without water, even in the summer heat--just be sure your soils are aerated and healthy.

Lawn Care Tips



Do you plan to overseed this fall? And why you probably should.

Grass gets old and worn out by constant mowing, and a grass plant might only survive 7 years. Since we cut grass before it seeds, the only way to replenish

dead grass is to add new seed.

If you have bare patches, too many weeds for your liking, pest problems, or weak grass, you should probably start overseeding each fall, along with organic soil amendments.

How to overseed:

- 1. Aerate if necessary.** If you cannot push a screwdriver in easily, the lawn probably needs aeration first.
- 2. Add a thin layer of well-aged compost** (1/8" to 1/4"). Grass seeds need contact with the soil, readily available nutrients, and moisture when seedlings are young. Compost provides all of these needs.
- 3. Distribute seed lightly and evenly across the lawn.** Imagine lightly tapping a salt shaker across the area. You can use your hand or a spreader, but we prefer by hand. Now, lightly rake the seed in with the compost.

4. Keep young, germinating grass plants well watered until they are established, usually a few weeks.

5. Once your seed germinates, you can then scatter more seed in the areas that still need grass, where you might have missed, or where seeds didn't survive.

6. Repeat every fall if you have too many weeds or bare spots.

Note: Always buy and use fresh seed.



How grass gets nitrogen.

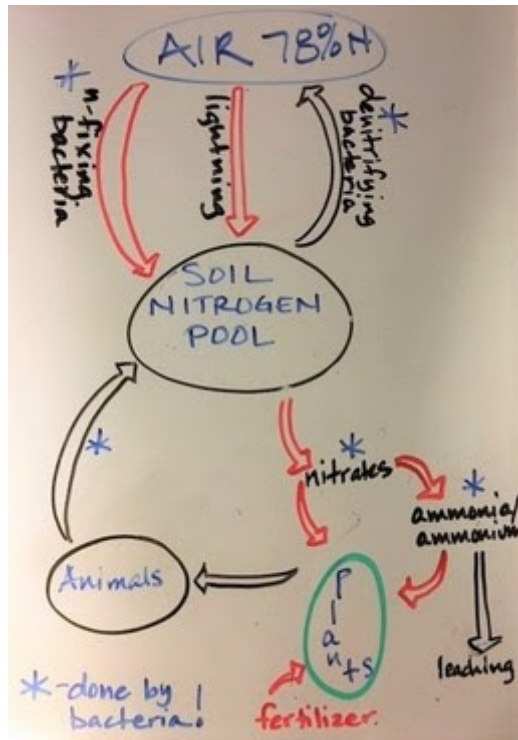
Nitrogen is abundant in the atmosphere, making up 78% of the air we breathe. But plants cannot use nitrogen directly from the atmosphere.

In order to convert atmospheric nitrogen to forms plants can absorb (nitrate, ammonium, or ammonia) we need either lightning or bacteria. Soil bacteria converts nitrogen to all three plant-available forms!

Support your soil bacteria!

Carbon is the main source of food for bacteria, and can easily be provided by:

- Leaving grass clippings after mowing
- Chopping up leaves directly onto the lawn
- Adding compost



Bacteria work in symbiosis with other biological processes to provide nitrogen to plant roots when they are able to absorb it. If we add synthetic nitrogen when the plants are not ready to absorb it, plants stop producing liquid carbon, and we end up with leaching of nutrients into our water ways, along with money down the drain.

Focus on [organic lawn care methods](#), and boost your soil bacteria!

In the Community



We're proud of our organic lawn!

This grass is safe for families, pets and wildlife.

Learn more about organic lawn care at montgomerycountymd.gov/lawns

Register your organic lawn in our new program!

Do you have an organic lawn that you are proud of? [Enroll your Organic Lawn](#), and inspire your neighbors!

We're looking for actively maintained lawns that are cared for without the use of synthetic fertilizers or pesticides. Your lawn

can help demonstrate to your neighbors that a lush and beautiful green lawn can be achieved organically.

As a thank you for going organic, we'll mail you a lawn sign, certificate, and two pairs of gardening gloves – all for free!

Farms can now be a part of the County's Green Business Certification Program



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