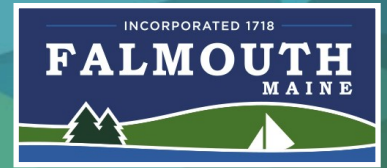


Organic Yard Management

Top 10 Practices



You can have a healthy, beautiful lawn and garden while protecting our environment and health. Here's how!

2

TEST YOUR SOIL

Why: A soil test will help you determine the health of your soil and what practices you can implement to improve soil health and create a healthy lawn and garden.

When: The ideal time of year to test your soil is mid to late spring or early fall.

How: You can get a free soil test kit from the UMaine Extension Office in Falmouth or you can order one online. <https://extension.umaine.edu/cumberland/horticulture/soil-test/>

4

WATER

Why: Watering the right amount at the right time ensures healthy lush lawns and gardens.

When: In Maine, well-established organic lawns require only 1"–1.5" of water a week (including rainfall). If watering is needed during a summer drought, be sure to water deeply and only in the morning hours.

How: Avoid frequent, shallow watering. This can lead to shallow root growth, which allows for weeds to colonize. It also creates a humid environment, which encourages harmful soil fungi and pathogens.



1

MAKE A PLAN

Why: Plan your ideal lawn and garden. How much lawn do you need? Think about alternatives to grass in areas that receive little sunlight, experience a lot of foot traffic, or are poorly drained. In wet areas, consider planting ornamentals that tolerate wet soil better than grass.

3

MOW SMART

Why: Mowing correctly is the easiest action you can take to ensure healthy lawns. A small change in how you mow can make a big difference.

When: Grass height should be at least 3" throughout the growing season. Only mow when it grows over 3." The last mow of the year should cut the grass down to 2" to avoid fungal problems developing over the winter.

How: Don't bag your lawn clippings. Leave clippings on the lawn to return organic matter and nutrients to the soil. In newer lawns, grass clippings can cut your fertilizer needs by 25 to 40 percent! In lawns 10 years old and older, grass clippings provide all the fertilizer your lawn needs.



5

AERATE SOIL

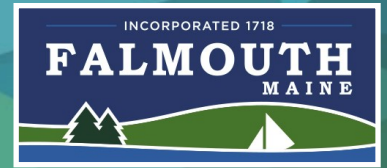
Why: Compacted soil encourages weeds.

When: Aerate the lawn in early fall to reduce thatch, improve drainage and loosen the soil.

How: Rent a core aerator from a local hardware or garden store. Aerators are heavy and burdensome, so you might need to hire someone to use it or contract with a lawn care company to aerate the soil for you.

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6

OVERSEED

Why: Adding grass seed to your lawn, known as “over-seeding,” is a more effective way to manage weeds than using herbicides.



When: Seed in late summer and early fall (following aeration).

How: Use a top dressing of ¼ inch of compost. If you have bare spots or areas where the grass is sparse, re-seed or over-seed with a mixture of grass cultivars. Maine’s Yardscaping program provides a helpful list of some grass seed sources. See link below.

7

FERTILIZE WITH CARE

Why: Natural organic products feed the soil, build organic matter, and encourage microbial diversity.

When: Apply organic fertilizer in spring or fall.

How: Compost can be applied yearly to add organic matter and jump-start soil biology. In the fall, preferably after aerating and overseeding, spread a ¼ inch layer of compost over your lawn. Compost tea and worm castings are great additions. You can also leave grass clippings and a thin layer of mulched leaves on the lawn as an alternative.



8

RETHINK WEEDS

Why: Many plants that are considered weeds in lawns have beneficial qualities. Clover adds much-needed nitrogen to soil. Crabgrass helps with erosion control. If you do want to eliminate certain weeds, many can be taken care of easily with organic practices.



9

PLANT NATIVE SPECIES

Why: Native plants are best suited to the local growing season, climate, and soils. They have natural defenses to insects and disease and will grow with minimal pesticide and fertilizer use. Native plants are essential for maintaining Maine’s beautifully diverse landscape and attracting pollinators.

MORE INFORMATION

- Bayscaping Tips: <https://www.cascobay.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/BayScaping-tips-to-keep-Casco-Bay-Blue-compressed.pdf>
- Growing a Healthy Yard & Garden: <https://www.southportland.org/departments/sustainability-office/grow-healthy-south-portland/growing-healthy-yard-and-garden/>
- Yardscape for a Healthy Yard: <https://www.cumberlandswcd.org/yardscape>

10

GO ORGANIC

Why: The use of organic pesticides that have one of the following labels will protect the health of people, pets, pollinators, and waterways.

Organic pesticides include: horticultural and insecticidal soaps, vinegar-based solutions, essential oil-based pesticides, diatomaceous earth, and biological based pesticides.



ALLOWED ORGANIC PESTICIDES

- Horticultural & insecticidal soaps
- Vinegar-based herbicides
- Essential oil-based pesticides
- Diatomaceous earth
- Biological-based pesticides (e.g. Bacillus thuringiensis)