

Learn how to grow a
lush, green lawn
that's barefoot safe.

It all begins with healthy, living soil.

RETHINK YOUR WEEDS

Weeds are nature's response to bare spots, poor soil, and lack of diversity. Nature strives to heal and restore balance and ecosystem health by introducing new plants, including weeds. Learn to "read your weeds" as signs of soil health. For example, dandelions indicate soil compaction, low pH, and low soil fertility, but they also support pollinators or can be made into a lovely tea and delightful crowns for children! Accept a modest number of weeds and hand pull the rest when roots are short and soil is moist. Overseed bare patches with fescues, perennial ryegrasses, and even some clover to help reduce weeds in your lawn.



FOR MORE HEALTHY LAWN CARE:

- YardScaping Fact Sheets: cumberlandswcd.org
- Scarborough Conservation Commission: tinyurl.com/scarborough-conscom



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HEALTHY LAWNS

for Scarborough's people,
pets, wildlife, and waterways

Scarborough Conservation Commission | 2022

ORGANIC LAWN & LANDSCAPE PRACTICES

Healthy lawns need healthy, living soil!

START WITH A SOIL TEST

A soil test is the only way to know what your soil needs. Don't waste time or money - free test kits are available from the UMaine Cooperative Extension or Scarborough USDA office, and the analysis costs less than \$20. **Test your soil *BEFORE* fertilizing.**

MOW HIGHER

Set mower blades to the highest setting - usually 3-4". Taller grass has deeper, healthier roots, making it a stronger plant. Leave the clippings for a free source of fertilizer. Consider switching to mulching blades, and keep the blades sharp.

WATER WISELY

Water deeply once or twice per week to train roots to grow deeper into the soil. Grass with deep roots are more drought-tolerant. Lawns need about 1-1.5" of water a week, and it's best to water all at once or split it into two watering sessions.



AERATE

If your lawn is compacted, full of weeds, or has bare spots, use a core aerator in the fall to loosen the soil so air, water, and nutrients can reach grass roots. Aeration also reduces thatch, improves drainage, and is great to do before topdressing and overseeding.

TOPDRESS WITH COMPOST

Add a thin layer of compost over the entire lawn to help build healthy soil, increase the soil's ability to hold water, and add nutrients. Topdressing is best done after aerating.

OVERSEED WITH THE RIGHT GRASS SEED

Add fescues, perennial rye grass, or YardScaping blends on top of your current lawn, on bare spots, and on topdressed areas to rejuvenate your lawn and outcompete weeds. Overseeding can be done anytime in the growing season, but the best time is mid-August to mid-September.

MIX IN SOME CLOVER

Add up to 10% Dutch white clover or microclover to your seed mix to reduce the need for fertilizer. Clover provides free nitrogen and crowds out weeds. It also attracts pollinators like honeybees and butterflies.

FERTILIZE IN THE FALL, IF AT ALL

Use your soil test results to determine how much fertilizer is needed, and focus on fall fertilizing. Conventional fertilizers may harm the life in your soil. Too much of **any** fertilizer can pollute streams, marshes, and bays, so use only what's needed.

EMBRACE MOSS

Moss grows where it's too shady for lawns (grass needs at least 6 hours of sunlight per day). Embrace your moss - it's easy to grow and is soft underfoot!

Reduce lawn size, consider lawn alternatives, let creativity flow!

ADD MAINE NATIVE PLANTS

Replace some of your lawn with beautiful native plants to attract birds and pollinators. Consider milkweed, asters, pussy willow, and others. Check out *The Wild Seed Project* and *Maine Audubon* to learn more.

DESIGN A THEME GARDEN

Consider a pizza or salsa garden, cut or dry flower garden, berry patch, kids' snack garden, nut or fruit tree grove, bird seed garden, canning garden, or certified wildlife and pollinator gardens.

EXPLORE PERMACULTURE

Permaculture is sustainable landscape design that mimics natural ecosystems. Attend a local "permablitz" to learn about practices like no-till sheet mulching, keyhole gardens, hugelkultur, food forests, chicken tractors, and more.

INSTALL A PATIO OR WALKWAY THAT SOAKS UP RAIN

Porous pavers and other natural covers allow water to soak into soil, reduce runoff, and filter pollutants that can end up in waterways.

ADD A CHILDREN'S NATURAL PLAY AREA

Connect your kids with nature! Natural play areas may include climbing rocks, stump jumps, tire swings, climbing trees, and sunflower tents. Get your kids involved in the design!

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Promoting safe and healthy landscapes for people,
pets, wildlife, and waterways

