

Natural Lawn Care Q & A

Is it possible to maintain my lawn without synthetic controls and fertilizers?

Of course; with a basic understanding of natural practices and some sense of timing a beautiful lawn can be maintained without the use of harsh synthetic controls and fertilizers.

Do I need to be a 'lawn expert' to do this?

Not an expert; just a basic understanding of the lawn's needs and the products available to fulfill those needs.

OK, what are the lawns basic needs?

You can maintain a lawn by simply watering, mowing, and feeding. However, if you want a higher quality lawn you will need to think about things like soil pH, weed prevention and control, and proper feeding schedules.

Whoa! Soil pH is starting to sound complicated and I really don't know much about it.

It's not complicated at all. Soil pH refers to the acidity / alkalinity of the soil where your lawn is growing. It is measured on a scale of 1 to 14; 7 is neutral; the low side means soil is acidic and the high side means soil is alkaline. The ideal pH for most lawns is very slightly acid (6.8). As the pH moves away from that optimum the grass is not able to use the fertilizer you apply efficiently and it can be lost. You can have your soil tested professionally for usually a very small fee or you can do it yourself with an inexpensive test kit from your local garden center.

How do I correct my pH if its' not near optimum?

You simply add lime to raise and sulfur to lower the soil pH. These are easy to apply with a drop or broadcast spreader.

OK, I have the pH issue down, but I keep seeing 'step' programs in stores and they all seem to have synthetic controls. What kind of products and schedule would I follow to maintain the lawn with natural products?

The natural program would look similar to one of those but would not include all of the potentially toxic controls and can produce similar results. The best way to keep a lawn free of weeds, pests, and disease is to maintain a dense, vigorous turf that crowds out weeds and can handle heat and drought stress that often bring on insects and fungal disease.

So what does a natural program include?

In the early spring apply Espoma Organic Weed Preventer Plus. This is an all natural material that feeds the lawn with slow release plant food and also inhibits the establishment of weeds like crabgrass. Timing and application rates are important; apply when you see forsythia or dogwood blooming and follow the rates on the bag.

While it is usually not required, some people apply a second, late spring feeding. The product for this application would be the Espoma Organic All Natural Lawn Food. This product includes a proprietary set of beneficial microbes proven to help all aspects of turf quality.

In the early fall use the Weed Preventer Plus to prevent establishment of fall germinating weed. A final feeding with the All Natural Lawn Food in late fall gets the lawn ready for winter.

That sounds easy. Is there anything else I need to know?

Just some good basic cultural practices:

- Raise your cutting height to at least 3" for cool season grasses and 2" for warm season grasses.
- Keep your mower blade sharp and never remove more than 1/3 of the grass blade in one cutting.
- Use a mulching mower and return clippings. This keeps them out of the landfill and adds important nutrients back to the lawn.
- Water 1" per week from rainfall or irrigation. In spring and fall this can be one or two time per week; in the heat of the summer lighter, more frequent watering is recommended.

Got it; where can I get more information on lawn and garden care?

All of this and more great information on gardening naturally can be found on our web site; www.espoma.com.