

When to Fertilize

For young lawns (less than 10-15 years old)

- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day

For older lawns (regularly fertilized for 10-15 years) and shady lawns

- Memorial Day
- Labor Day

For lawns where clippings are removed

- Memorial Day
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Early October

Choosing a Fertilizer

3 numbers on all fertilizers

- 1st is the percent of nitrogen (N). Lawns need more N than other nutrients.
- 2nd is the percent of phosphorus (P). Usually 0 because it is banned except for new lawns or if a soil test shows a deficiency.
- 3rd is the percent of potassium (K). Should be 0 because it is only needed if soil test shows deficiency.

Read the label

- Nitrogen should be 25-50% insoluble (slow-release).
- Green-up is slower but lasts longer (2 months or more).

Organic fertilizers have mostly slow-release nitrogen

- Very slowly available – only 25-50% in 2 years.
- Lawn will be less green compared to conventionally fertilized lawns for the first few years.

For More Information

UW-Extension Horticulture Team

<http://hort.uwex.edu>

UW Extension Publications:

<http://learningstore.uwex.edu> • 1-877-WIS-PUBS
Organic and reduced-risk lawn care (A3958)
Do-it-yourself alternative lawn care (A3964)
Lawn Fertilization (A2303)
Watering your lawn (A3950)
Growing Grass in Shade (A3700)
Lawn Establishment and Renovation (A3434)
Lawn Maintenance (A3435)
Lawn Aeration and Topdressing (A3710)
Lawn Weed Prevention and Control (A1990)
Sampling Lawn & Garden Soils for Soil Testing (A2166)

UW-Extension Horticulture Help Lines

Milwaukee County	414-256-4664
Waukesha County	262-548-7779

UW-Extension Horticulture Center

at Boerner Botanical Gardens
in Whitnall Park, Hales Corners, WI

Become a Master Gardener Volunteer

Milwaukee County UW-Extension Office

414-256-4600
<http://fyi.uwex.edu/sewmg>
9501 W Watertown Plank Rd., Building A
Wauwatosa, WI 53226-3552

Waukesha County UW-Extension Office

262-548-7770
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/waukesha>
515 W Moreland Blvd., AC-G22
Waukesha, WI 53188



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Your Lawn... Your Choice

Conventional, Organic or Somewhere In-between

Start with the basics....done right



Mowing



Watering



Fertilizing

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SouthEast Wisconsin
Master Gardeners

Mowing

- Set mower as high as possible - ideally, 3 - 4".
- Leave clippings to return nutrients to soil.
- Do not cut off more than 1/3 of height at once.
- * Sharpen your mower blade often.

Watering

- Keep lawn dense by watering to prevent dormancy during drought.
- Provide 1" of water all at once weekly.
- Time the collection of 1" in straight-sided containers under the sprinkler.
- Water less in shade.
- * Water early so leaves dry quickly before disease-causing fungus infects leaves.

Fertilizing

- Keeps lawn dense which reduces weeds.
- Choose fertilizers with at least 25-50% slow-release nitrogen.
- Apply at proper times for the age and light levels of your lawn. Fertilize less in shade.
- Apply just before it rains or water-in.
- Weed and feed separately for proper timing of both.



Making Choices

Organic Lawn Care

- Uses only natural products for fertilizing and controlling weeds, insects and diseases.
- Emphasizes soil care including topdressing with compost and core aerating twice a year.
- Weeds are hand-pulled or dug. Organic herbicides exist but not many. Repeat applications are usually needed.
 - Corn gluten meal is a pre-emergent but is not organic if derived from genetically modified corn.
 - Vinegar, soaps, and plant oils burn leaves of weeds *and* grass but *not* the roots so they will re-grow.
 - Chelated iron herbicides will selectively burn many broadleaf weeds, and will not harm the grass.
- Organic insecticides and fungicides exist but not many.

Challenges

- Products usually expensive, less effective and need repeated applications.
- May be labor intensive.
- There are no official standards for organic lawn care.
- Difficult to get results comparable to those of conventional lawn care on a large scale.

Topdress by evenly spreading up to 1" of high quality compost

- Use composted manure and other fertilizers may not be needed.
- Composted yard waste is lower in nitrogen.

Core aerate to mix-in the compost and help soil "breathe"

- Cores should be as deep as possible.
- Vertical impact machines go deeper than drum types.
- Leave "cores" on lawn.
- Easier when soil is moist.

Conventional Lawn Care

- Can use any of the full range of synthetic products for fertilizing and controlling weeds, insects and diseases.
- Products are highly effective and less expensive than organic.
- Synthetic products pose an acceptable amount of risk when used properly according to the EPA.
- This approach often produces the highest quality lawn for lowest price.

Reduced-Risk Lawn Care

- An organic-based system that is less strict and allows occasional use of low-risk synthetic products listed on the EPA reduced-risk program.
 - Most reduced risk products are only available to lawn care providers and other professional turf managers.
- Uses the same good soil care as organic lawn care including topdressing and core aerating twice a year.
- More vinegar, soap and oil products are allowed for weed control than for organic lawn care.
- Can produce a high quality lawn for a modest increase in price compared to conventional.



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