

# Going Green with Organic Solutions

## Natural Lawn Care Tips

### Look at your mowing Practices-

A healthy organic lawn starts with a healthy root system, and healthy roots start with good mowing practices. One thing to practice is letting your grass grow longer. That's right, start with a sharp mower blade to reduce the stress on the grass and set the blade higher. 3-4 inches works for most grasses – which helps crowd out weeds, keeps moisture in the soil and supports deeper roots. But the most important mowing strategy of all is to leave grass clippings on the lawn to decompose. They're a great source of free nitrogen. And if the clippings get too dense, rake some of them up, and add them to the compost pile, leaving just enough on the lawn to decompose without getting in the way.

Mow your lawn on a weekly basis, before weeds get too high and begin to re-seed.

### Adjust your sprinklers-

We have to change the way we water. Overwatering not only wastes a precious resource, it may actually harm the lawn. Frequent, shallow irrigation encourages shallow roots. Waterlogged roots may rot or become unable to take up nutrients. Organic lawns, with deeper, healthier root systems, require less water over time and are better able to withstand drought. Water deeply once or twice a week, and turn off the sprinklers during rainy times.

### Feed the Soil –

Apply a thin layer of compost to the lawn every spring and fall. A bagged compost or soil conditioner is ideal for this project, as homemade compost may contain weed seeds. Spread ¼ to ½ inch of compost over the lawn – a 2-cubic-foot bag will cover about 100 square feet. Rake it into the grass, then water. Compost products that contain worm castings or beneficial microbes are especially appropriate for top-dressing lawns, and may be the only supplemental feed the lawn needs. Woodley's has 3 organic soil builders - Mushroom Compost, Fafard

Soil Conditioner and a Woodley's exclusive Soil builder that has mycorrhizae in the soil. And if the lawn does need more fertilizer during the growing season, you can apply Espoma's Turf Tone or Milorganite to the lawn for additional feeding.

### Watch out for Thatch –

A lawn that has been treated with chemicals for years may have biologically inactive soil. This condition prevents organic matter, like dead roots and leaves, from breaking down. The result: a layer of thatch that blocks healthy growth. This kind of thatch buildup creates anaerobic conditions. A simple aerating tool, or spiked aerating sandals that strap onto shoes, make the job easy. Do this once a year in the spring and then follow it with feeding the soil.

### Choose the right conditions for the lawn –

Most lawns need at least 4-6 hours of sunlight to thrive. Choose the right grass for the right sun situation. If your area is mostly shade, then consider adding some perennial or shrub beds to take up space instead of grass.

## Weed Control Strategies for Gardeners

Organic weed control starts with a relaxed approach to weeds. "People should realize that with organic measures, you're not going to be 100 percent weed free. But you know what? Weeds are green too, They're not that bad"

### Crowd Them Out-

Is it possible that, even though you think you need a herbicide, you would be better off buying another plant? Adding more plants to your border could crowd out unwanted weeds. Or in a vegetable garden, add more compost and plant your plants closer together, making it harder for weeds to grow.

## **Going Green w/Organic Solutions cont.**

### **Smother with Organic Matter –**

Even gardeners who make their own compost may prefer to buy bagged compost and mulch products to smother weeds. After all, weed seeds can end up in the compost pile, making the homegrown version risky as a weed control strategy. A layer of no more than 3 to 4 inches of mulch may be the best way to keep weeds down in established beds. When mulching beds, leave a small space in between the plant stems and mulch. You don't want mulch sitting directly on stems, this action will decrease chances of insect damage to your plants and allow more air circulation around the plant's base. Remember that bark and wood products can deplete the soil of nitrogen as they decompose, so you should either use well aged compost or add a supplemental organic fertilizer. Sometimes compost isn't enough in large beds with lots of space for weeds to grow. One strategy is a layering method that involved adding layers of overlapping cardboard or five to six newspaper sections on the area. Wet the paper to hold it in place, then start piling on layers of aged manure, grass clippings or mulch.

**Smother with Weed Barriers –** landscape fabrics and other synthetic barriers can suppress tough perennial weeds. Apply mulch or organic matter on top of the barrier.

### **Tolerate Some Weeds –**

"People who are really adamant about going natural are going to have to tolerate some weeds". "...it may take two or three years" to organically remove most perennial weeds. A little clover in the lawn is not the end of the world and a few weeds in the vegetable bed won't make the tomatoes taste any different. In fact, some weeds including dandelions, attract beneficial insects that help pollinate crops and eat other bugs.

Use Espoma's 4n1 Weed Control to apply spot treatments to the most troublesome areas.

### **Grab a tool –**

"If you want to be chemical-free, you're going to have to put in a little elbow grease. Weeding is great exercise..." The right tool can make hand weeding the most viable option for the average backyard gardener. It may be impossible to hand weed 5 acres, but a lawn and a few flower beds can certainly be managed with hoes, trowels, and weeding knives that reach between cracks in stone and brickwork.

## **Fungus & Disease & Insect Control**

There are organic products available to combat disease, but the real focus should be on increasing the health of the soil and implementing a few common sense strategies to keep disease to a minimum. "Fungus and disease problems can be the hardest to treat organically, because the strategies often involve prevention, choosing disease resistant varieties and tolerating a little unsightly damage."

### **Tolerate Cosmetic Problems –**

Every summer, the Crossvine and Honeysuckle get powdery mildew. This is something that happens with the kind of summer humidity we have. This mildew won't hurt the plant and will clear up by itself. If you wish, you can pick off the leaves, and discard any diseased leaves in the trash can, not in a compost pile, or left on the ground.

### **Rethink Drainage and Air Circulation –**

Improving drainage can also make a difference in controlling root rot. In clay soils, gypsum, sand, or gravel helps water drain away from the roots. Sunlight and good air circulation are also important so pruning or transplanting may solve the problem.

## **Going Green w/Organic Solutions cont.**

### **Change Watering Practices –**

Try to not use overhead watering on your plants because getting the foliage wet can bring on mildew. Also, water in the morning hours and not the evening hours to give plants a chance to dry quickly. Consider drip irrigation or soaker hoses, which help conserve water and prevent soil from splashing onto the plant and spreading soil-borne disease.

### **Compost –**

“Healthy soil is the key to healthy plants”. Every year add layers (2 to 4 inches) of mushroom compost or Fafard Soil Conditioner. You can work the compost into the existing soil, or allow it to seep into the soil naturally. Woodley’s also had a custom soil blend that contains a beneficial fungus called mycorrhizae. When mycorrhizae is introduced to your existing soil, it reproduces and naturally improves the soils you have. By the way, when you purchase a Monrovia grown plant, your plant comes with this beneficial fungus. Monrovia prides themselves in adding mycorrhizae to every plant they grow. When you add their plants in your yard, you are automatically introducing this fungus in your soil.

### **Fertilize –**

Woodley’s offers the Espoma line of slow release granular organic fertilizers for your needs. Liquid organic fertilizers that contain seaweed or fish emulsion are also great alternatives as well as Mepkin Abbey’s Compost Tea. Remember, healthy plants that are getting the nutrients they need can often outgrow a short term disease problem.

### **Use Fungicides & Insecticides**

(when necessary)

Woodley’s sells Safer Fungicide for flowers, fruits, & veggies. And for insect control, use Safer Insect Killing Soap or Natural Guard Spinosad Landscape & Garden Insecticide.

## **Organic Vegetable Gardening**

### **Don’t skimp on soil preparation -**

add up to 50% organic matter to your existing soils. Woodley’s carries mushroom compost, Fafard Soil Conditioner, Mepkin Abbey’s Earth Healer Chicken manure, or Woodley’s Custom Soil Blend with beneficial mycorrhizae already added. Work into the soil 6 to 12 inches. Remember, it’s all about the soil, don’t miss this crucial step.

### **Consider raised beds –**

it allows better drainage and aeration to plant’s roots.

### **Fertilize –**

Dry organic fertilizer, like Espoma’s Garden-tone works well and you don’t have to apply as often as liquid. If you prefer liquid organic fertilizers, try Fish Emulsion. Again, if you get Woodley’s custom soil blend, beneficial mycorrhizal fungus is added to the soil. This good fungus contacts the roots of plants and encourages healthy root growth.

### **Check soil pH.-**

IF the pH is wrong, plants can’t access the nutrients in the soil. Woodley’s sell pH meters or you can send a soil sample to Clemson Ext. for a complete analysis. Clemson will ask if you are gardening organically, so they can recommend the correct treatment.

### **Make good plant selections –**

Try veggie varieties that are naturally pest and disease resistant and adapted to the local climate. Don’t plant all heirloom varieties, they are delicious but some years they produce a lot and some years they don’t. Try some hybrids as well.

### **Set up a Smart Watering System –**

Water conservation is important part of a sustainable vegetable garden, and a steady drip irrigation or soaker hose puts less stress on the plants and reduces the possibility of soil-borne pathogens splashing up onto the leaves and spreading disease. Add rain barrels to your downspouts at home and use “free” water to keep your garden watered.

## **Going Green w/Organic Solutions cont.**

### **Woodley's**

### **Organic Products**

#### **Fertilizers & Soil Enhancers**

Espoma Palm Tone for palms, hibiscus & tropical plants  
Espoma Garden Tone for vegetables tomatoes & flowers  
Espoma Garden Gypsum loosens clay soil  
Espoma Greensand soil conditioner  
Espoma Turf Tone for lawns  
Espoma Holly Tone for hollies & other evergreens  
Earth Safe Fish Meal  
Fertilome Fish Emulsion  
Mepkin Abbey's Compost Tea  
Hi Yield Cottonmeal to add nitrogen  
Hi Yield Bone Meal to add phosphorous  
Hi Yield Blood Meal to add nitrogen  
Milorganite Lawn Fertilizer & acts as a deer repellent  
Ecojoy – blend of organics including fish meal, alfalfa, cottonseed, kelp  
Permatill loosens clay soil and vole deterrent  
Fafard Mushroom Compost  
Fafard Soil Conditioner  
Woodley's exclusive Custom Soil Blend with beneficial mycorrhizae  
Mepkin Abbey's Earth Healer - Chicken Manure

#### **Beneficial Bugs**

Ladybugs  
Earthworms  
Nematodes

#### **Insecticides & Fungicides & Repellants**

Natural Guard Lawn, Plant & Pet Insect Spray  
Natural Guard Spinosad Landscape & Garden Insecticide  
Safer Insect Killing Soap with Seaweed Extract with OMRI rating  
Safer Fungicide with OMRI rating  
Plantskydd Deer Repellent  
Diatamaceous Earth for crawling insects  
Safer Japanese Beetle Trap  
St. Gabriel Laboratories Milky Spore Powder for Japanese Beetles  
Fertilome Dipel Dust contains bacillus thuringiensis for crawling insects like hornworms  
Organic 1 Commercial Insecticide for fireants

References: Garden Chic Magazine articles by Amy Stewart - Jan. & March 2008 issues; IGC magazine - Jan. 2009 issue