



10 SIMPLE STEPS TOWARD A SAFE & HEALTHY LAWN

1. Do a soil test to determine whether or not any supplements (potassium, phosphorus, etc.) are needed. Free soil test kits are available at University of Maine Cooperative Extension York County, 21 Bradeen St, Springvale, Me 04083 (800-287-1535) (there is a small fee when you send in your sample to be analyzed.) If you must fertilize, use slow or time-release fertilizer products if at all possible, and only in the fall on established lawns.
2. Avoid the use of phosphorus unless indicated by the soil test, or when establishing new lawn from seed. Lawns rarely need anything more than nitrogen, if that.
3. Check weather conditions before applying any fertilizer or pesticides, and do not fertilize or apply pesticides if rain is predicted (or if ground is saturated.) Use only fertilizer products that contain slow or timed release nitrogen (check product label). Water in lightly – no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch.
4. Contrary to popular belief, spring is not the best time to fertilize. At that time, nitrogen will encourage top growth at the expense of root growth, and will also encourage germination of weed seeds. If fertilizer is applied, it is best done between late August and Columbus Day. Instead, rake, de-thatch or aerate your lawn in the spring to help stimulate healthy growth and then overseed with a tall or fine fescue mix.
5. Mow your lawn in the spring when it reaches 3" or more and leave the clipping on the lawn. They're a great source of nitrogen rich free fertilizer. Cutting higher reduces weed invasion (especially crabgrass), creates a deeper root system and helps the lawn recover faster from drought, so make the 3" the norm. Follow the 1/3 rule. Avoid mowing off more than 1/3 of grass height to reduce the stress induced by mowing.
6. Leave at least a 25' buffer zone of untreated grass or other vegetation around any wells, wetlands, streams, coastal areas or other water bodies.
7. Know the size of your lawn. Strictly follow package directions and never exceed the maximum amount to be applied. Over-application of any fertilizer or pesticide, even organic products, can have a negative effect on lawn health and the watershed, causing algae blooms that deplete oxygen and suffocate marine life. Avoid making pesticide applications while lawn weeds are in bloom (clover for example), which has been shown to have a negative impact on pollinators. Never leave fertilizer, weed or insect controls on asphalt, concrete or other impervious surfaces. Sweep them back into the lawn or dispose of them according to label directions.
8. Water wisely and infrequently. If absolutely necessary, deeply soak the lawn once or twice a week with about 1" of water. Deep watering encourages strong root growth, while frequent light watering increases the potential for harmful pesticide or fertilizer runoff and encourages thatch buildup. Install a rain sensor or turn your irrigation system off if rain is forecasted to avoid overwatering. For best results, program your irrigation to water just before dawn.
9. To minimize weeds, regularly overseed your lawn with fine or tall fescues, white clover and other grasses appropriate for this climate. Maximum density minimizes weeds.
10. Manage pest problems with spot applications. Don't broadcast pesticides like grub and crabgrass control or weed and feed. Pesticides can be toxic if overused or carelessly applied, and long term effects on health are unknown. Look for biological, mechanical or physical ways to control pests instead of pesticides. Grass grown on healthy soils which is properly mown will seldom have pest problems. Make record of any pest problems you encounter, as well as fertilizer and pesticide applications. Records will help you produce a safe and healthy lawn in future years.

Biddeford Yard Smart



SEVEN QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LAWN CARE COMPANY

If you use a lawn care service and would like to have your lawn cared for in a healthy way, you can ask the following questions:

- Will you do a soil test before applying any fertilizers? Find a company that applies fertilizer only when test results show that it's needed.
- Are insect and weed control products applied on a fixed schedule? If so, this is not the company to hire, since weather conditions, historical monitoring, and the current extent of the problem should be considered in any application program.
- Do you use non-chemical controls where possible? Use spot treatments instead of broadcast applications? Use watering, mowing and aeration methods that improve grass plant health?
- Are you licensed by the Maine Board of Pesticides Control? An applicator must be licensed in order to apply pesticides on a "for-hire" basis (Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides, "weed and feed" products, fungicides and others).
- Are you willing to mow higher and be flexible when you mow? Water only when needed?
- Can you make suggestions for a more sustainable or ecological lawn? For reducing lawn size? For planting native species?
- Are you aware of the City of Biddeford's recommended Best Management Practices, and are you willing to follow them?

Above all, avoid the "one size fits all" approach to lawn care. Not every lawn is the same, and a reliable contractor should be able to tailor a program to fit your requirements.

For additional information visit Biddeford Conservation Commission at:

www.biddefordmaine.org/conservation

Biddeford
Yard
Smart
Take the Pledge Today



- I pledge to minimize my reliance on weed and insect controls and take a healthier approach to lawn care in order to ensure the health and safety of our watershed.**

Name (please print clearly) Date

Address City State Zip

Email

I will do my best to follow these guidelines:

- Test my soil first.
- Avoid the use of phosphorus unless indicated by the soil test.
- Not apply fertilizer if a strong rain is predicted. Use only fertilizer that contains slow or time release nitrogen.
- Fertilize in the Fall not the Spring to encourage root growth for a hardier lawn.
- Mow my lawn when it reaches 3" or more and leave the clipping on the lawn to act as a natural fertilizer.
- Create a minimum 25' buffer zone of untreated grass or other vegetation around water bodies.
- Know the size of my lawn and not over-apply fertilizer. I will read the directions before applying.
- Water my lawn wisely and infrequently. Turn my irrigation system off if it is going to rain.
- Allow clover to grow so it can compliment grasses, fill in where grass can't grow and help control weeds.
- Use herbicides/insecticides sparingly and only in the spots needed. I will weed by hand if possible.
- Not leave fertilizer, weed or insect controls on impervious surfaces. Sweep them back into the lawn.

Mail your pledge to: Biddeford Conservation Commission, Attn: YardSmart, 205 Main Street, Biddeford, ME 04005

Or simply go online to make your Biddeford YardSmart Pledge at: www.biddefordmaine.org/conservation