

1.) **Get a Soil Test**—Never spend money on any fertilizer or soil amendment without consulting the results of a soil test first. Find out your soil's pH and other characteristics by sending a sample to the soil lab at the University of Massachusetts; visit their website for complete details <https://ag.umass.edu/services/soil-plant-nutrient-testing-laboratory>. For a small fee, you will receive an analysis and recommendations for improving your soil. Some nurseries also provide soil testing services for a reasonable price, and can help you interpret the results.

2.) **Grow the Right Grass**—The most common lawn grasses in North America, Kentucky bluegrass and Bermuda grass, also need the most water and fertilizer to grow well. In Massachusetts, lawns comprised of "tall fescue" grasses are a better choice than bluegrass lawns. Fescue lawns are drought tolerant and insect-resistant, and will survive in sunny or shady areas.

3.) **Water Sparingly**—Water deeply and infrequently so the roots of the grass learn to grow down into the soil to get the water they need. Morning watering is recommended.

4.) **Think of Your Soil as Alive**—"Dirt" is what you track into your house. The material that grows your lawn, the soil, is alive with organisms large and small. Nurturing that life through proper use of natural materials will lead to a successful natural lawn.

5.) **Mow Properly**—Recycling your grass clippings by leaving them on the lawn will provide approximately half of your lawn's fertilizer needs for the season. Keep your mower blades sharp. Lawns should be mowed no lower than 2.5 inches, even higher in the summer.

6.) **Do not use pesticides to kill grubs**—Pesticides are not particularly selective, and you may be killing beneficial microbial life that feeds on the grubs. A healthy lawn should be able to support up to twelve grubs per square foot. In most cases, simply reseed the area. Compost and compost tea are helpful. If the problem persists, use beneficial nematodes, natural predators of the soil that feed on grubs.

7.) **Add Compost**—Nature's most magical soil additive, compost, contains all sorts of beneficial microorganisms that add life to the soil. These organisms will interact with the organic fertilizers to provide the green lawn many of us covet. Compost in liquid form, known as compost tea or extract, should be used in combination with dry compost because the liquid form is available to the soil and grass more quickly. This is especially important during the years of transition from a synthetic system.

8.) **See Weeds as Part of Nature**—Proper lawn care maintenance can naturally eliminate most weeds, such as allowing grass to grow 4 inches or higher. By mowing less, longer grass blades can naturally shade out weeds and support stronger roots. Taller grass supports greater photosynthesis, and supports native pollinators and increases beneficial insects.

9.) **Avoid synthetic chemicals**—After you mow, fertilize naturally by leaving grass clippings on the lawn. Fine grass pieces are easily digested by soil microorganisms, creating nitrogen rich fertilizer. Similarly, fallen leaves can also be left on your lawn year-round as a natural fertilizer. Mow over the leaves to add nutrients to the grass or leave them in your gardens and remove the leaves in late Spring.

10.) **Overseed Regularly**—In nature, all plants produce seed to reproduce themselves. In a lawn system, where we mow regularly, grass is not allowed to reproduce and even the healthiest plants get tired. By overseeding in spring or fall, you are introducing robust young plants that will fill in bare areas and compete aggressively against weeds.
