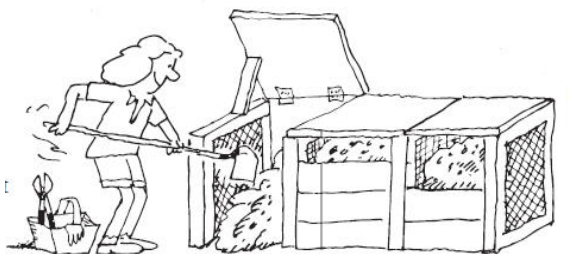


Compost

Compost is the heart of natural lawn care because it increases organic material, delivers nutrients, improves water retention, balances pH, and creates an excellent bed for seeds. Purchase compost from trustworthy sources or start your own compost pile.



You can make compost at home, or buy it in bags or bulk. Leaves, chopped stalks, flowers, grass and vegetable kitchen scraps all make great compost in a pile or bin—just keep the pile moist, make sure there's enough air flow, and wait a few months. In an urban or suburban area, food scraps should be composted in a rodent-resistant compost bin or a worm bin to prevent pest problems.

Compost Tea

Compost tea is a liquid form of compost and, like compost, it contains a lot of soil microbes. Microbes are an important part of soil because they activate nutrients in the soil. Use this brew as often as you like; compost tea can be either bought or home-made.

Diversify Your Lawn

In Illinois, lawns have displaced the native prairie plants that evolved to the specific demands of our climate. The reason turf grass takes so much work to maintain is because it is not native to our region.

Consider diversifying your yard to include native grasses, trees, bushes, and flowers. These will enhance the beauty of your home, attract birds and beneficial insects, and free you up from the time and effort of tending the grass. When you do choose to plant grass, choose seed that is adapted to our climate, such as rye and fescue varieties.

Lawn to Lake is a collaborative program to protect water resources in the Great Lakes region by promoting healthy lawn and landscape practices. With funding from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, partners are coordinating a pollution prevention campaign addressing the needs of those responsible for lawn and landscape care in the Southern Lake Michigan basin. Collaborating partners include Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, Safer Pest Control Project, and University of Illinois Extension.



IISG-12-26



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www.lawntogreatlakes.org

LAWN TO LAKE

Products For Your Natural Lawn

Fertilizers and Amendments to
Improve Soil Health

Congratulations! You have chosen to transition your lawn to natural lawn care and are ready to get your hands dirty, but how should you begin? This brochure includes a list of products and soil amendments that can be used to add nutrients and change the pH of your lawn, which affects the availability of all plant nutrients.

Plant By-Products

Corn Gluten. A natural herbicide, corn gluten is sold in three forms: powder, granules or pellets. This product prevents weed growth by drying out seeds after they crack open to sprout. Therefore, wait at least one month after corn gluten application to plant grass seed. Corn gluten is also a good source of nitrogen. Apply corn gluten in early spring, when the forsythia bloom, and again in late fall. Be sure you purchase real corn gluten, not corn gluten feed or grain.

Alfalfa Meal. Often called 'green manure,' alfalfa meal is a great source of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous. Spread this fertilizer on soil surfaces, but do not apply it in the root zone – which is below the soil's surface. Because alfalfa meal heats up the soil, only use it in small amounts to avoid plant burn. Caution: some alfalfa meals may contain unwanted seeds. Alfalfa meal is commonly used as one part of a fertilizer mix.

Seaweed. Soil needs a healthy amount of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous but also needs trace elements and natural plant growth hormones. Seaweed can give your soil these often overlooked nutrients and hormones. This 'ocean potion' not only reduces the stress level of grass, but it also improves the availability of naturally occurring minerals in the soil.

Animal By-Products

Blood Meal. A by-product of animal processing, blood meal is an excellent source of nitrogen. Mix it with your compost to speed up the decomposition process. Do not mix blood meal with seedlings. Use it only in small amounts to avoid plant burn and be sure to activate the fertilizer with a basic watering.

Bone Meal. Bone meal is a top natural source of phosphorous. Unlike some fertilizers, bone meal works especially well with root systems. This is a slow release fertilizer that should be raked into the soil either at the start of the growing season or a few weeks before planting. Never use products high in phosphorus unless you are seeding a new lawn or responding to a soil test.

Fish Products. Fish products come in a variety of forms, such as fish emulsion, fish meal, fish powder or liquidized fish. Nutrient release time depends on the type of fish fertilizer being used, but fish products are generally more available to plants than animal fertilizers.

Chicken Manure. Rich in potassium, nitrogen and phosphorus, chicken manure provides more nutrients than most other manures, such as cow or horse. Although considered safe, it is a good idea to handle any manure-based fertilizer with gloves.



Vermicasting. Vermicasting is essentially worm waste. Often called 'black gold,' this fertilizer comes directly from worms. Vermicasting is a unique fertilizer because it makes use of already present, but previously unavailable soil nutrients. Unlike other soil activators, vermicasting makes nutrients immediately available to plants after application.

Minerals

Lime. Lawns can have an ideal pH level. Nutrients are more available between the pH levels 6.3 through 6.8. Lime is useful in reaching and keeping a perfect pH level on acidic lawns that have a pH reading below this given range. A soil test will determine the appropriate type and amount of lime to apply. Lime works best when used in the fall because winter weather helps to drive lime into the ground. Caution: because lime is a respiratory irritant be sure to use lime pellets, not powder. The liming of lawns takes a number of applications and growing seasons before the pH level changes.

Sulfur. Like lime, this mineral also helps to balance pH levels. Unlike lime, sulfur should be used to lower an 'alkaline' pH soil reading that is over 7. Use this mineral after performing a soil test to determine the correct application amount. Adding sulfur to change the pH level will take a number of growing seasons and applications until the pH level changes.