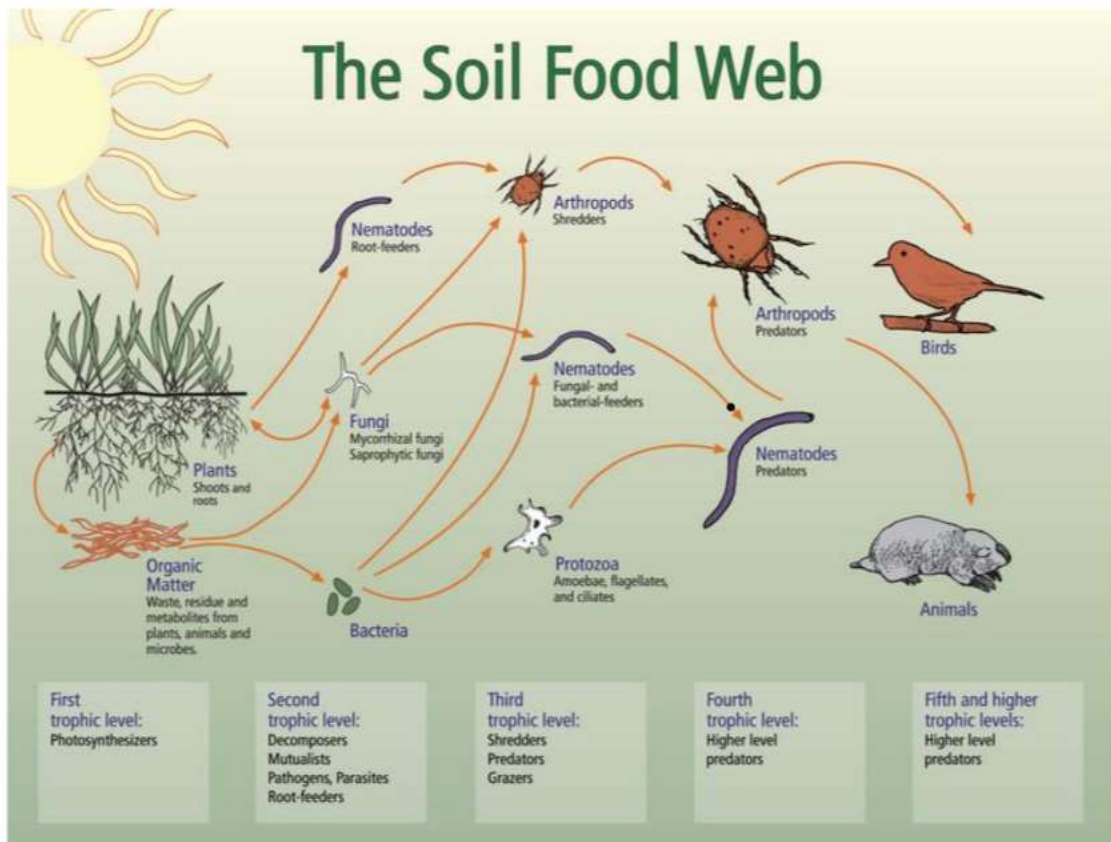




12 Step Program For a Chemical Free Lawn How to Maintain a Healthy-Lake Lawn

Chemical free Lawns are safe for kids, animals and the environment. Lawns with healthy soils take less maintenance time and cost = more family time & relaxation time!



How to Implement Your 12 Step Program

1. **Tolerate a mix of plants:** Allow or even encourage plants such as clover, to grow in your lawn. Clover is a soil & lake friendly source of nitrogen. In the past it was added to lawn seed mixes.
2. **Manually remove weeds:** Hand pulling plants you do not want, is the best method to control them. More than 80% of “weeds” are annuals. Hands remove annuals before they seed, and remember to remove the roots of perennials. Don't give up! (Note: More methods for dandelions are available.)
3. **Re-seed bare spots:** Before weeds take over the bare soil patches, fill them in. Plant a seed mixture rather than a single variety to build a healthy turf that is drought and disease tolerant (e.g. 20% Kentucky Bluegrass, 30% Creeping Fescue, 35% Tall Fescue, 15% Rye Grass).
4. **Remove Thatch:** The matted and dense layer of dead plants and grass on your lawn can inhibit plant growth and prevent air, water and nutrients from reaching the soil. If thatch is more than 1/2" thick, use raking and aeration to remove the excess.

5. **Aerate lawn:** To break through the thatch and reduce compaction of soil. This encourages deeper rooting and allows water, nutrients and organic matter to feed the soil.

6. **Add nutrients naturally:** use vegetable-based compost from yard and household wastes or from packaged or bulk composts. Natural composts improve the soil's ability to retain and release nutrients, and they are alive with beneficial micro-organisms which speed up the decomposition of grass clippings and thatch.

7. **Mow high:** Keep grass 2-3" high to encourage taller grass which will crowd out weeds, encourage longer roots and shade the soil. Never cut off more than 1/3 of the height at a time. Keep the mower blades sharp so you don't damage the grass.

8. **Leave grass clippings on the lawn:** Less raking! Leave grass clippings on the lawn to return nutrients to the soil. Grass clippings begin to decompose almost immediately and are free and natural nutrients for your lawn.

9. **Water deeply & infrequently:** If the weather does not cooperate... Only water your lawn once a week for no more than one hour (this is equivalent to 2.5 cm (1") of water). LONGER GRASS = DEEPER ROOTS = LESS WATERING. Frequent switching to self-sustaining soil, it can take time to bring the soil microbial life back. Commit to a light watering encourages shallow roots and leaves the grass vulnerable to insects and disease. Water slowly for better absorption.

10. **Monitor your lawn:** Simply noting the characteristics of your lawn can be the best indicator of your lawn health. Sometimes it will take 2 or 3 years to establish a healthy web of life, but falling back on synthetic fertilizer will defeat the progress you've gained.

Test your soil: The true indicators require:

- A proper soil kit - Good soil tests will give your soil's PH, organic matter content and nutrients needed to balance it. To obtain proper soil test kits contact: Dept. of Agriculture & Fisheries, Quality Evaluation - Laboratory Services P.O. Box 550 Truro, N.S. B2N 5E3 OR
- Get your soil tested by Down to Earth Labs – <https://downtoearthlabs.com/home>

11. **Add alternative plants:** Biodiversity, a variety of native plants, trees and shrubs, perennials, ground covers and wild flowers provide the best defense against the insects, weeds and diseases that can cause problems for your lawn. Caution, some wild seed mixes have been found to contain invasive species of flowers. The Alberta Invasive Species Council has lists and information about what is not good. The PLWA worked with a biologist familiar with Pigeon Lake and there is information about the good plants and plants to eradicate on www.plwa.ca and click on Stewardship found under the Home Page banner.

12. **Encourage & develop a tolerance for "weeds":** Aside from noxious or invasive plants, a weed is simply a plant that is where it is not supposed to be. Most insects are not harmful. Using the above organic gardening steps to encourage micro-organisms. Welcome birds and beneficial insects like ladybugs, spiders and dragonflies.

PLWA Summer Staff can help, contact info@plwa.ca or go to: www.plwa.ca

Thanks for being a healthy-lake steward!