



## Spring into Action Getting to the Root of the Matter How to Maintain a Healthy-Lake Lawn



Healthy for kids, pets, the watershed & the lake!

Our work with the Alberta Low Impact Development Partnership reminds us lawns have a negative impact on biodiversity and pollinators, and since turf is next to hard surfaces as the least absorbent surface on your property it promotes more unfiltered runoff. Less lawn is better for the lake.

Still have some lawn? Here are tips to help you minimize your lawn's impact on the lake. (For additional resources from the Pigeon Lake Watershed Association's *Healthy-Lake Lawns Program* go to: [www.plwa.ca](http://www.plwa.ca))

**Grass needs are simple** – sunlight, water, nutrients, and some circulating air around their roots. When the grass and the soil is naturally healthy, it can stay free from disease and bad bugs, and outcompete unwanted plants.

**Timing:** In early spring, many people like to "clean up" yet many good bugs (such as lady bugs who eat aphids) begin life in the collections of leaves and debris at the base of trees and bushes. Generally, they mature enough to move on around the May long weekend. Try to leave the leaves around the outer edges of the lawn and at the base of plants until closer to the long weekend.

**Note:** The soils' web of life involves complex and highly organized sets of interactions and processes among plants, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes and other soil microbes. These beneficial organisms exist in symbiosis with plants. Most vegetables, annuals, and **grasses** do best in bacterially dominated soils.

**Read more on** [Organic Approaches to Promoting Soil Nutrient Management \(https://bit.ly/2ZIUrdw\)](https://bit.ly/2ZIUrdw)

### Spring Actions for a Healthy-Lake Lawn:

**I. De-thatch your lawn** – The goal is to scratch the surface and to collect any clumps of extra dead material on the lawn and to break up the dead material so it does not create a barrier for meeting its needs.

1. **Use a rake.** Get rid of the old matted grass (thatch) and get some good exercise. The old bamboo rakes, are great for this job. It is recommended to put a layer of duct tape across the top towards bamboo tines to reinforce them.
2. Alternatively, for a big lawn you could **use a dethatching machine** (also known as a power rake). These should only be used a lawn when it is dry.
3. What you rake up is a **perfect base ingredient for compost**. If you do not have a composter, we encourage you to start one, recycling the nutrients already in the watershed. Aged, brown organic materials support fungi; fresh green organic

materials support bacteria. Check out: [Making Compost - Black Gold for Your Organic Garden](https://bit.ly/2UFaEfl) (<https://bit.ly/2UFaEfl>)

4. **Aerate your lawn** – Consider hiring a local firm to aerate your lawn especially if your lawn care use to include synthetic or harmful chemicals (e.g. fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides). Once your soil is healthy, the microbes will aerate the soil although the high traffic areas may still need to be aerated.
  - a. Allows air, nutrients and water to get down to the grass roots.
  - b. Helps to reduce the soil compaction.
  - c. Some “weeds” will out-compete the grass in areas of compacted soil.

## II. Consider Your Lawn Mower – Alternatives

1. **A “Real” (push) light weight mower** – no noise, no gas, no on-going cost, never bother your neighbours, very safe and fun to use. Some gas mowers can pump as much carbon-dioxide into the air as a car travelling 20 kilometers. New models are very light, easy to use and cuts grass cleanly. However, not recommended for grass higher than 3.5 inches.
2. **Use a mulching mower** to return the nutrients in leaf litter back to your soil. They are a great source of nutrients. Note: If dandelions have gone to seed – pick up the mulch when you mow or you spread the seeds.

## III. Maintain your lawn mower, if you did not in the fall –

1. **Clean your mower** of caked on grass to help ensure that you do not pick up and distribute any disease.
2. **Sharpen the blades.** It is better for the grass to have clean cuts.
3. **Mowing practices** –
  - a. **Cut grass at 2-3” high** to crowd out weeds encourage longer roots and to shade the soil.
  - b. **Leave the grass clippings on the lawn** to decompose and become a natural lawn fertilizer.
  - c. **Leave 2/3 of the grass when cutting.** More than 1/3 of the grass at a time is hard on grass to lose a lot of its photosynthesizing ability all at once.
  - d. **Varying your mowing pattern** from one mowing to the next.

## IV. Over seeding / Seed mixes –

1. If your lawn is mostly Kentucky Bluegrass, **please consider moving to drought tolerant native grass** by over seeding with seed such as Sheep Fescue, Creeping Red Fescue, Tall Fescue and Ryegrass. WHY? Kentucky bluegrass has a very short root system and requires more nutrients and water, so no more than 10-20% Kentucky blue grass is recommended. Where to get seeds: See the [Good Lawn Products](https://bit.ly/2UEQLFR) (<https://bit.ly/2UEQLFR>).
2. Consider **adding Dutch or white clover to your lawn.** The clover fixes atmospheric nitrogen to the soil. Clover use to be added to lawn mix because it is a good companion for grass. Have at least 5% of the lawn in clover.

**V. Water deeply & infrequently** – LONGER GRASS = DEEPER ROOTS = LESS WATERING

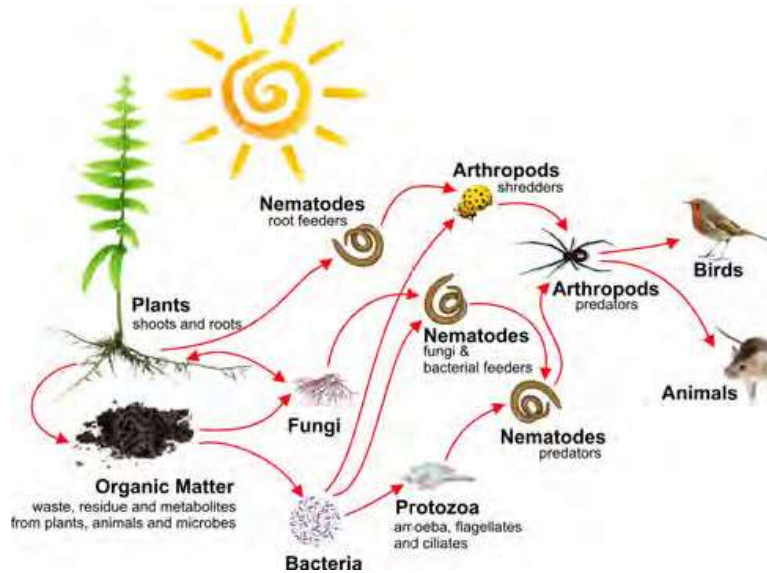
1. Ideally, it will rain once a week for no more than one hour and not on weekends!
2. For stretches of dry weather, **infrequent thorough watering encourages deeper roots**. Only water the equivalent to 2.5 cm (1") of water once a week. Frequent light watering encourages shallow roots and leaves the grass vulnerable to insects and disease.
3. **Water slowly** for better absorption.

**VI. What to do with lawn patches suffering from winter kill** –

1. **Rake the area** taking off the dead grass.
2. **Over seed** with our recommended seed mix (see above and recommended products list).
3. **Top-dress with compost** (see above and recommended products list).

**VII. Start a composter if you do not have one already.**

1. Use the nutrients already in the watershed versus adding additional nutrients.
2. Use a mix of "browns" (old leaves and dead grass) and "greens" from your kitchen.
3. More on composting coming soon.



By making these choices you can treat yourself to a lawn, which is safe for children, pets and the environment! Yes, you can have a healthy lawn and help protect the lake and ground water in the Pigeon Lake Watershed!



For more resources check on the [www.plwa.ca](http://www.plwa.ca) > Click Stewardship > Healthy-Lake Lawns  
Thank-you for being a good lake steward!