

Health Notes from the Burlington Board of Health

Lawns We Can Live With

You *can* have a green, thriving lawn and a garden free of toxic chemicals – using safe, inexpensive, and easy-to-use methods. Do your part to protect children, pets, wildlife and Lake Champlain.

Chemical Herbicides and Pesticides: What are the Risks?

Chemical products are not just poison the bugs and weeds you want to eliminate. With every use there is some risk to people, animals, birds, fish and the ecosystem. Chemical herbicides, fertilizers and pesticides run off into the Lake Champlain and contribute to pollution of this important water source and natural resource.

These products are also a source of dioxin-like byproducts, which act like hormones and disrupt human and animal systems even in small amounts. Children and pets are often more affected because they have more direct contact. Children are also vulnerable because their bodies are still growing and there is evidence that multiple exposures to small amounts may have cumulative impacts over time.

Are There Practical Alternatives to Toxic Chemicals?

Yes! Weed-n-seed and quick-fix bug and weed killers are not the bargain they sometimes seem. These products are like “junk food” for your lawn, which becomes more dependent on more products and more care over time. These products kill earthworms, which help aerate the lawn. As a result, more thatch builds up and fewer nutrients are available. Beneficial insects, fungi and bacteria are also killed off and it is easier for fungal disease and pest species to thrive. Lawns also develop more shallow roots and are less resilient from dependence on chemical fertilizers. Grass becomes weaker, thins out, and is more vulnerable to any stress. More weeds and pests can move in, creating a vicious cycle that requires more chemicals, more work and is more costly.

In contrast, using non-toxic methods really begins to pay off with less cost and less work once healthy, thick lawn begins to crowd out weeds. A natural balance of beneficial species prevents disease and bug damage. Products like corn gluten (to control weeds) and nematodes (to control grubs) don't weaken the grass and become effective each year your use them.

Natural lawn care avoids the health and pollution problems of chemical products, but it also is less costly, less time-consuming and less work!

BURLINGTON'S PESTICIDE ORDINANCE

1. Anyone who applies herbicides or pesticides, fertilizers or other products containing herbicides or pesticides (including weed-n-seed products) in ANY part of the City must:
 - A. Provide written pre-notification to occupants of adjacent properties before each application. Notification may be given up to 10 days before, but not less than 24 hours in advance. The notice shall include a fact sheet approved by the Board of Health and indicate when and where the pesticides or other products will be applied. (Very small, homeowner-applied, spot treatments may be exempt from pre-notification only; call for more information.)
 - B. Post signs at the beginning of application, which must remain posted for at least 24 hours. Signs must be posted every 100 feet, at least two signs per property, and be easily visible.
2. No pesticide or herbicides, or products containing them (includes weed-n-seed), may be applied outdoors on properties that fall within 500 feet of Lake Champlain, or within 500 feet of its tributaries. Special permission must be obtained from the Burlington Board of Health before applying in these areas. Many parts of the City are included in this zone and not all are near the Lake. **Phone Code Enforcement at 863-0442 to find out if a property falls within this zone.**

3. No pesticides or herbicides, or products containing pesticides or herbicides may be applied on the grounds of any public or private child care center, day care home, preschool or K-12 school without specific approval from the Burlington Board of Health.

There are additional requirements for all commercial applicators. For more information about the pesticide ordinance and maps of the restricted zone, to request permission to apply in the Buffer Zone, or to report a violation, call **Burlington Code Enforcement 863-0442**.

Natural Lawn & Garden Basics

MOW HIGH: Set your mower's cutting edge at 3 inches. Cut off about an inch when the grass reaches 4 inches. Longer growth encourages deep roots, and helps control weeds and grubs. And you can mow less often!

WATER LESS OFTEN, BUT LONGER: Too much dampness contributes to disease and insect problems, so no more than once per week watering is a good rule during continuously dry times. Deep, infrequent watering encourages deep grass roots and a lawn that can resist dry conditions.

FEED THE SOIL: Lawn clippings are free fertilizer, so leave them on the lawn. Apply organic compost to give your garden a boost. Always choose slow release, low or no phosphorous fertilizers.

AERATE: Be sure the soil is loose enough for nutrients and water to move through and to drain well. Aerate in spring using tools or spiked shoes designed to open up the surface. Add 4-6 inches of organically rich, sandy topsoil if your soil does not drain well. Earthworms keep the soil loose, so avoid chemical herbicides or pesticides which will kill them off. Chemical fertilizers and weed-n-seed products also foster thatch build-up and compacted soil.

RE-SEED REGULARLY: If your lawn thins out in spots, you should fill in by sprinkling seed by hand. Regular, yearly over seeding is crucial to a weed-free lawn because the weeds can fill in areas only where thick grass is not maintained.

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USE NON-TOXIC CONTROLS: To control crabgrass and other weeds, spread corn gluten meal products. Regular use over time is increasingly effective and acts as a great fertilizer for the lawn. Nematodes that target Japanese beetle grubs can be purchased in liquid bottles that attach to your garden hose. Simple soap and water can keep insects off plants until natural predators like birds and beneficial wasps reduce their numbers.

WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- www.spcpweb.org
- www.grassrootsinfo.org
- www.4lakes.org
- www.ghlp.org
- www.mcdef.org
- www.toronto.ca/pesticides