

ORGANIC LAND CARE HOMEOWNER CHECKLIST

YEAR I

Assess and map out your site. Create a plan for your site that will help reduce outside inputs and energy needed to have a healthy lawn and garden.

- Determine North, South, East and West directions and how the sun moves across the property to create areas of sun versus shade
- Determine predominant wind direction and air movement through the property.
- Identify poorly drained and compacted areas– Puddles remain for 4 to 6 hours after an average rainfall.
- Identify areas that should be kept as lawn.
- Identify lawn areas that can be converted to low maintenance zones, perennial gardens, or other groundcovers suited to sun and moisture conditions.
- Identify existing wildlife habitat to protect or determine plants that will attract beneficial wildlife and insects.
- Identify invasive species for future removal.
- Identify impervious surfaces that could be converted to pervious areas in the future.
- Identify high maintenance plants for future removal and replacement.

Soil- Assessing and improving soil health is the basis of organic land care.

- Take a soil sample and have it tested for fertility, texture, and organic matter content.
- Based on soil test recommendations, add organic-based fertilizer, and/or compost and lime (to adjust pH, if necessary). Best time to fertilize a lawn is in the fall.
- Read fertilizer labels carefully and avoid prohibited substances.
- If lawn is compacted, aerate the soil and apply a thin layer of compost. May be necessary to hire a professional.
- Start composting.

Lawns- Promote healthy turf that needs minimal inputs for growth

- Mow high- raise blade to 3 inches to promote deep root growth.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn or compost them.
- If necessary, seed bare or thin spots in the fall or early spring.

Water- Reduce the need for irrigation

- Water deeply and infrequently, if necessary- not more than 1” per week including rainfall.
- Water in the early morning only, while the dew is still on plants.
- Install a rain gauge to determine weekly rainfall.
- Mulch garden beds. Apply no more than 2-3 inches around landscape plants.

Weed Management- Weeds and the types of weeds that grow in the landscape are indicative of soil health issues or deficiencies.

- Keep conditions unfriendly to weeds by:
 - Aerating compacted soil
 - Mowing high (3 inches)
 - Avoiding mowing during drought and heat waves
 - Watering properly (do not overwater)
 - Overseed in the fall
 - Mulching in flower beds, around bushes and trees, etc.
- If weeds are already established, these organic methods are recommended for removal:
 - Hand pulling
 - Flaming weeds with a portable propane torch
 - Covering weeds with PVC-free plastic sheeting and “cooking” them
 - Organic herbicides that are OMRI approved
- If there are less than 30% *desirable* lawn grasses present, consider a complete lawn renovation.

YEAR 2

In addition to many of the Year 1 practices add the following:

Soil- Promote beneficial microbes in your soil.

- Brew your own or purchase compost tea and apply to lawn and garden.

Lawns- Create a diverse landscape.

- Decrease lawn area based on first year's site assessment. Convert to low-maintenance zones, stone gardens, moss gardens, perennial flower gardens, etc.
- Increase the diversity of turf species in your lawn by over-seeding in the fall. Choose turf seed with endophytes.
- Seed clover into the lawn in the fall.

Water- Eliminate the need for regular lawn and garden irrigation

- Reduce lawn irrigation from previous year. Water deeply and infrequently and in the early morning
- If using an automated irrigation system, utilize rain sensors.
- Identify where stormwater drains off the property and any locations to redirect that stormwater so it soaks into the ground (for example, redirecting downspouts to a lawn or garden).
- Install a rain barrel for watering garden beds.

Plants- Use native plants that need little water and fertilizer to thrive.

- Start removing invasive species. For example, ornamental shrubs known to be invasive in natural areas.
- Start replacing high maintenance, or invasive ornamental plants with native or non-invasive plants.
- Establish vegetated buffers along streams and wetlands using native plants.
- Plant the right plant, in the right place- match plants to the conditions in your landscape. For example, the amount of light, moisture, and soil type.