

Healthy Living Strategy: Lawn Care

Aeration

Aeration is an important step in maintaining a healthy lawn or garden without the use of chemicals.

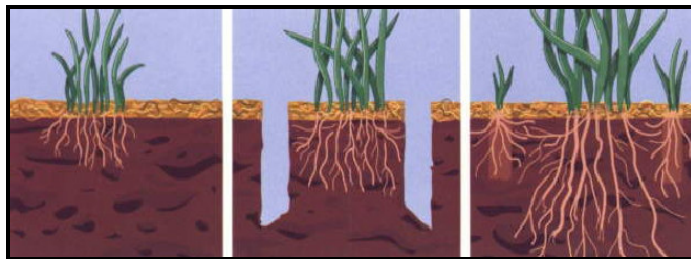
Why Aerate?

Aerating your soil:

- Decreases soil compaction
- Increases water retention capacities
- Increases air circulation to plant roots
- Prepares your soil for overseeding
- Breaks down the thatch layer, reducing insect and weed infestations

Foot traffic is a major source of compaction for landscapes. Compaction causes problems in your lawn or garden by reducing air space in the soil, making it difficult for roots and water to move through the soil. The result is poor plant growth.

A common practice is to aerate your soil by removing cores. The resulting holes provide a direct route for air, water, fertilizer and organic matter additions to reach the soil. Coring also helps to reduce thatch levels in your lawn or garden.



When Should You Aerate?

The best time to aerate is in June or in the fall, in order to avoid times when heavy seeder weeds germinate and may grow in the plug holes. Fall aeration allows for both improved fall growth and continued success next spring. It is recommended that you aerate your lawn or garden at least once a year.



Aerating machines can be rented from a nursery or tool rental store. For small areas, you can go over your lawn with a garden fork or a special hand fork sold for this purpose. Spiked, walk-over sandals can also be bought for do-it-yourself aeration.

When aerating, move over the lawn in one direction and then repeat crosswise. The deeper the penetration of the aerator, the better.

After You Aerate

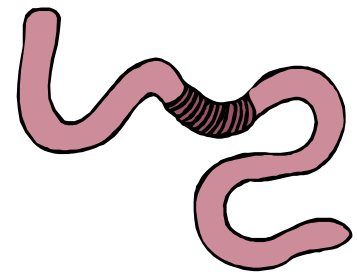
Following aeration, your lawn or garden should be able to go longer between waterings without showing signs of wilting. Over time, with repeat aerations, your lawn or garden will show enhanced heat and drought stress tolerance.

Overseeding with a mixture of native grasses is recommended following aeration to fill in the weak spots in your lawn and to help crowd out weed seeds that disperse throughout the summer. An organic fertilizer can then be applied to help get the seeds germinated and to increase microbial action in the soil.

Nature's Aerators

Healthy lawns contain natural aerators in the form of earthworms. Earthworms create tunnels, which help to aerate and loosen the soil. This allows more oxygen to penetrate the soil, which not only helps the plant directly, but also improves conditions for certain beneficial soil bacteria.

Earthworm tunnels also provide access to deeper soil levels for the numerous smaller organisms that contribute to healthy soil. Earthworms themselves decompose thatch, deposit nutrient-rich castings and help to neutralize the soil.



Increasing Your Earthworm Population

You may want to add earthworms to your soil to help keep your lawn or garden from becoming compacted. Be sure to choose a variety that will survive in garden soil, such as *Lumbricus terrestris*, and not one that is adapted for living in a compost pile.

When adding new worms, distribute them around the lawn so that there are only a few per square foot. Dried leaves and other organic materials are their favourite food source and need only to be spread on the surface in the spring.

