

Soil Health

- At least once a year, apply compost on your lawn to a depth of 1/4"; follow up with aeration
 - You can rent an aerator from local equipment rental companies. Check the phone book or Google "charlottesville aerator rental".
 - Join in with some neighbors and rent it together to aerate multiple lawns in one weekend.
 - The best time to aerate depends on the type of grass you have. For cool season, aim for early fall. Late spring or early summer is the most effective time for warm season species. If you're trying to build up the soil base of an existing lawn, do this step twice per year.
- Every 3-4 years, retest your soil for the pH level, potassium and phosphorous. Follow up on the lab results by using the recommended soil and lawn amendments.



What's the benefit of adding compost?

Compost adds organic matter to the soil, which reduces compaction and increases the ability to retain water and nutrients. This makes your lawn better able to withstand drought and resist disease. Compost is also "fertilizer lite". Adding it to your soil reduces the need for synthetic fertilizer.

Compost can also be used as a mulch.

Click [here](#) to for a primer by the Extension Office on what compost is - and isn't.

Weeds, Bugs and Disease

When it comes to controlling insects, weed growth and diseases, it is important to remember that if you regularly maintain your lawn with all of the tips listed above, you likely have very few of these pests to deal with. A healthy lawn withstands disease, quality soil contains good microbes that help repel bad bugs, and thick turf makes it difficult for weeds to take root.

- The issue of weeds is primarily an aesthetic one. Perennial type weeds can be quite water efficient. Keep this in mind if considering the application of chemicals to your yard.
- Crabgrass is killed with the first frost. Consider simply waiting for nature to kill it and then performing your fall seeding (paying particular attention to seed where the crabgrass was).
- Killing weeds without putting down new seed just creates space for other weeds to move in. Save your herbicide applications for the time of year when your lawn should also be reseeded.
- A specialty herbicide called "Drive" (quinclorac) is available for homeowners and can be used prior to seeding cool season grasses in the fall.
- Organic weed control option: Corn Gluten Meal (*not* corn meal). Can work as a preherbicide on a variety of weeds, but effects last only a few weeks.

- Grass that is cut shorter than the recommended height is more vulnerable to disease.
- Turf in closed off areas with little airflow is more susceptible to disease. Consider strategically pruning larger plants that are blocking air movement or creating a [different type of landscape](#) in this area.
- Grass blades left in standing water for longer than 48 - 96 hours are more susceptible to disease.
- Warm temperatures and excess moisture breed disease, especially Rhizoctonia blight (brown patch). During such periods, it is better to turn off any supplemental irrigation and keep your lawn on the dry side between rainfall events.

- Don't apply pesticide unless you know the problem is caused by an insect. Drought, disease and poor soil fertility can create problems that may seem like bugs. (Just because you see a bug, does not mean it's causing the problem. Many bugs are helpful, essential, to soil and lawn health. Catch the bug in question and take it to the Extension Office for identification.)
- Learn about reduced risk pesticides from the [Environmental Protection Agency](#), and review the Pest Management Guide on [this webpage](#) from the Extension Office.