

# Tips for a Pesticide Free Lawn



**Control Weeds:** Hand pulling weeds before flowering and seed setting is the best method of weed control.

**Re-Seed Bare Spots Before Weeds Fill Them In:** Plant a mixture of drought and disease resistant grasses rather than a single variety to build healthy turf (i.e. 20% Kentucky Bluegrass, 30% Creeping Fescue, 35% Tall Fescue and 15% Rye Grass)

**Aerate Your Lawn:** This alleviates soil compaction and encourages deeper rooting and allows water, nutrients and organic matter to feed the soil.

**Fertilize Naturally:** If you need to fertilize use organic choices these may seem expensive but they are of greater value due to their long term benefits. Organic fertilizers amend the soil improving it's ability



to retain and release nutrients. In addition, they are alive with beneficial micro-organisms which speed up decomposition of clippings and thatch. On the other hand, inorganic fertilizers contribute toxic salts that can build up in the soil over time. It is recommended to use slow release formulas and to leave your clippings on your lawn.

**Mow High to Discourage Weeds:** Keep your mower blade at a height of 7cm (3") and never cut off more than a 1/3 of the blade at a time. Ensure the mower blades are sharp so you don't damage the grass. Taller grass helps crowd out weeds, grow longer roots, and fairs better in hot dry weather.

**Leave Grass Clippings On the Lawn:** Grass clippings (mulch) return nutrients to the soil which reduces the need for fertilizer by 30-50%.



**Water More Deeply & Less Frequently:** Let your lawn soak up 2-3cm (1" or a frisbee full) of water **once a week.**

*Deep Watering = Deeper roots = Less watering!*  
Frequent light watering encourages shallow rooting and leaves the grass vulnerable to insects and disease. Water slowly for better absorption, if water begins to run-off finish your inch on your next scheduled watering day.

**Consider Alternative Plants:** A variety of native plants will provide the best defense against insects, weeds and disease that can cause problems for lawns and gardens. Minimize traditional turf areas by increasing mulch beds with drought tolerant perennials, shrubs, trees and native grasses.

# Did You Know?

## Some creatures provide natural pest control

- Bats, spiders and birds eat insects
- Bees and wasps pollinate plants
- Earthworms and ants turn organic matter into soil and even aerate the soil in their process
- Toads eat slugs, cutworms, aphids and flies

## Nuisance weeds such as dandelions spread by seed or root division

Dandelions like bare patches and unhealthy lawns. If you have too many dandelions for your liking, the natural way to get rid of them is to hand pick them, digging up the entire root to a depth of at least 7-10cm (4"). However, top-dressing your lawn with a compost mix will strengthen turf allowing a higher resistance to dandelions.

## Improper use of pesticides affects everyone's health

Young children, because of their size and under-developed immune systems are especially at risk. The effects of pesticide exposure over several years or a lifetime are not fully understood; however, immediate side affects due to over exposure include:

- headaches
- dizziness
- nausea
- tiredness
- stomach cramps
- skin & eye irritation

## Improper use can also pollute water

When it rains, pesticides can wash into the Sheep River - our drinking water source and the home to many birds, fish and wildlife.

Protecting the quality of our water is another good reason to reduce the use of pesticides. Also, broad-leaved selective herbicides containing 2,4-D will also kill flowers and vegetables it comes in contact with. Round-Up or similar glyphosate herbicides can be used in gravel and patio areas, but will kill other plants it comes into contact with.

## What is a Pesticide?

A pesticide is a product which may cause an adverse affect on any living organism. Pesticides such as insecticides, herbicides and fungicides are commonly used to kill insects, weeds and plant diseases. A few insects or weeds doesn't mean there is a pest problem that needs chemical control. These agents will always be present to some degree.

## Public Notification of Pesticide Use "Right to Know" Bylaw 33-98 & Amended Bylaw 44-98

The Town of Okotoks follows an integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) and applies chemicals only when weeds are beyond acceptable threshold levels. Weed problems will be prevented and managed using a variety of alternative methods and conventional herbicides.

Through the IPM program, the Town has substantially reduced the use and reliance on herbicides. When herbicides are to be used on commercial and institutional lands intended for public use, the applicator MUST notify the public under The Right-to-Know Bylaw 33-98 and amended Bylaw 44-98.

**Please refer to the full bylaw and Integrated Pest Management plan on the website:**

[www.okotoks.ca](http://www.okotoks.ca)

**Use respect, its a Neighbourly thing!** The Town of Okotoks encourages respect and courtesy towards your neighbours by asking you to take personal responsibility in letting your neighbours know you will be applying chemicals on your property.

## If You Must Use Pesticides...

### Select products that are:

- Specific to the problem
- Sold in small amounts
- Ready to Use - these products are not concentrated and the amounts are at the proper levels. They are less risky because no mixing is needed.

**Reduce your use of pesticides:** by only applying the pesticide to the location where there is a problem (spot treat).

**Granular Herbicides:** are not very effective on weeds and can pose a threat trees and groundwater as they leach into the ground. Thus, these chemicals are a significant threat to groundwater and the water quality of the Sheep River.

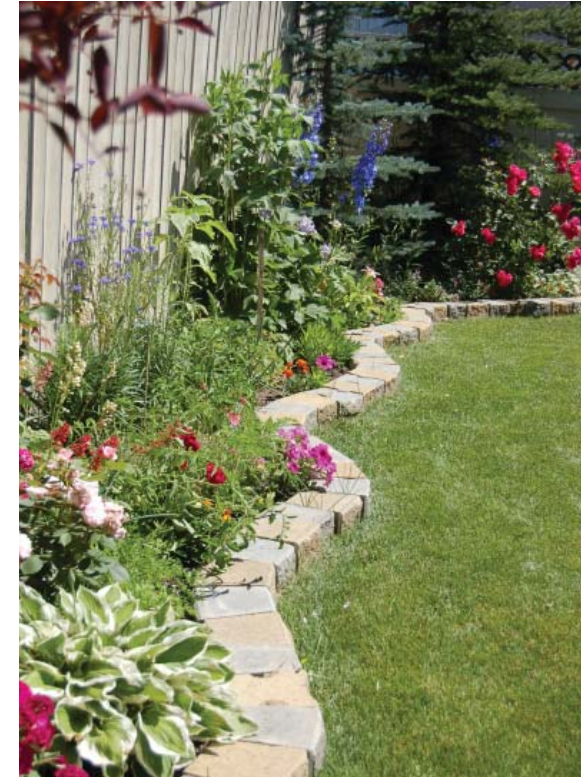
## Tip for Removing Insects

- Use a water nozzle to spray off aphids and other insects.
- Use insecticidal soaps directly on insects such as a mild solution of dish soap. Be sure to rinse the solution off the leaves after 20 minutes.
- Additional Resources can be found at:

**[www.okotoks.ca](http://www.okotoks.ca) or call the Horticulture Hotline: 938-8031**



# Guide to Responsible Pesticide Use



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