

The problem with turf grass is that it is non-native to our region, has shallow roots, requires frequent watering during dry spells, has difficulty competing with broad-leaf weeds, and is often treated with chemicals (synthetic fertilizers) harmful to our environment. The benefit of a lawn is that it can be walked on. When that space is not needed for your dog, paths, or play, consider alternative landscaping. Reduce the size of your lawn and grow more beneficial plants. However, if you have a lawn, please care for it in an environmentally friendly way.

A healthy lawn depends upon the soil. Amending the soil to increase the fungi, bacteria, microscopic life, and moisture retention capabilities is the best move. Compost, not synthetic chemicals, do this.

All turf grasses that grow in Michigan are “cool season” which means they will go dormant in summer without a lot of moisture. Expect to see some browning unless you make up for an inch of water a week in our 6-8 weeks of normal summer dry spell. The browning does not mean the lawn is dead. In cooler, wetter weather it will green up.

### **To care for your lawn in an ecologically safe manner, follow these Four Steps:**

1. Take a soil test. You can obtain the kit from MSU Extension or take about a cup of soil gathered from 10 areas of the lawn to McGough's in TC. (Information on the proper method to take a soil test is on the internet.)
2. With soil test results in hand, go to McGough's, or another knowledgeable source, and ask for their recommendations. Tell them you are not interested in synthetic fertilizers, like Scotts or True Green. The staff should be helpful with identifying which products will provide the minerals and micronutrients lacking in your soil. Purchase a targeted broadleaf spray, if desired, to manage the broadleaf weeds.
3. If the soil is generally low in organic matter (i.e. sand) adding a top layer of good compost can do wonders to feed and restore the soil and the lawn. Using a mulching mower to leave grass clippings in place, and mulching fall leaves with the grass is recommended. Organic lawn feeding is recommended twice a year, spring and fall, or more often if the soil needs it.
4. Water generously the first and second seasons of new seed. To germinate grass seed, it must be kept moist. Once started, a good watering 2-3 times per week is far better than a light sprinkle daily. Watering early morning or early afternoon is best, according to MSU Extension. Mow as high as possible, 3-4 inches, and less often, every two weeks. The long blades shade the roots and leave less soil accessible to weed seeds in the air. Know how to turn off your irrigation during rainy spells!

A fescue mix for turf grass is a good alternative. Fescue seeds (no-mow mix) can be found at Prairie Nursery in Wisconsin or McGoughs in Traverse City. Fescues are tougher than conventional turf grass. Pennsylvania sedge is a nice lawn alternative. It looks like lawn, it may be mowed a couple of times in a season if you must, but cannot take the foot traffic of turf grass. It can be installed as an extension of green space and is an especially nice ground cover in a semi-shade area where turf grass does not want to grow.

If the soil grows moss... welcome it as a lawn alternative! There is no problem with a moss lawn.

**Note:** *Never add a pesticide to your lawn. They are harmful to beneficial insects, pets, and people.*