

Weekly Column for Week of 10-19-09
Ericka Soumare
Purdue Extension, Elkhart County
Agriculture and Natural Resources Educator
Phone: 574-533-0554
17746 C.R. 34, Goshen, IN 46526

Organic Options for the Lawn

In a previous article, I discussed some practices that are beneficial to controlling weeds in the yard such as mowing grass at 2.5 to 3.5 inches and irrigating properly to promote a healthy yard that can fight against weeds. I also talked about chemicals that can be used to control weeds. For individuals that seek more alternatives to chemical control, I would like to discuss organic options for lawn care. If the lawn is healthy, weeds have less of a chance to grow.

Before deciding what may be needed in the lawn, it is beneficial to know what the condition of your soil is. This will help you determine what nutrients you may need. A soil test is usually needed to provide this information. After knowing what the soil is lacking, measures can be taken to improve the soil structure.

Milorganite is a good source of iron for the lawn, while recycled grass clippings and leaves can be left to break down and add other nutrients back into the soil. So, after mowing properly as discussed earlier, the grass clippings can be left in the yard. This is something to consider while mowing the grass these last few times before winter comes around because the grass clippings will improve soil texture as they slowly release nutrients into the soil.

Potassium can help the lawn withstand temperature fluctuation and disease. One way to help add potassium to the lawn is by using wood ash. Keep in mind that wood ash should only be used in small amounts. This is because it can take away some of the acidity in the soil that is needed for plants to take up nutrients. If a soil test shows the soil to be acidic, an application of 20 lbs per 1000 square feet annually is enough. If the soil is shown to be neutral or alkaline, which is the opposite of acidic, then wood ash should not be used.

For more information on organic lawn care, you can visit the web at <http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/ID-182.pdf> or www.agr.state.nc.us and http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/itg_feb96.html. You can also contact your Elkhart County Extension office at 574-533-0554.

Purdue University is an equal access/equal opportunity institution.