

Best Management Practices to Reduce Pest Issues on Low-Maintenance Turf

Integrated pest management is the practice of using knowledge, monitoring, recordkeeping, and communication to reduce pest risk with the least amount of pesticide use possible. Giving the turf you want the best chance to thrive is the number one way to reduce pest damage.

1. Know Your Site
 - Learn about the soils and drainage patterns in your area.
2. Choose the Right Turfgrass for the Right Spot
 - Select turfgrass varieties that require less water, fertilizers, and pesticides.
 - Determine the duration and exposure of the sun/shade and choose turf varieties that will tolerate those specific conditions along with pedestrian traffic patterns. Learn what grass tolerates your conditions.
 - See the resource "[Turfgrass Species and Variety Guidelines.](#)"
3. Be Water Wise
 - Water the lawn only when needed but to the depth of the root zone.
 - Irrigate generally 1" per week if there is no rain, or allow to go dormant if unused during summer.
 - Consider reducing irrigated turf with drought tolerant ground covers where appropriate.
4. Know Your Pests
 - Make sure the pest is correctly identified and use the most appropriate integrated pest management (IPM) approach to control the problem.
 - Determine the tolerable threshold for each pest whether it's a weed, insect, or disease.
 - Learn to recognize a grassy weed from a broadleaf weed.
 - If using herbicides, select a product labeled for lawn use. Use Ready-to-Use products as a spot treatment instead of a broadcast application when possible.
 - Always follow label instructions for rates, mixing, application method, and safety precautions.
 - Only apply an insecticide if you have a problem.
 - The best defense against diseases is to properly irrigate, fertilize, and follow maintenance practices to avoid stressing the turf.
 - Contact your local cooperative extension service for help, if needed.
5. Prevent Pollution Possibilities
 - Prevent fertilizer, pesticides, and debris from entering water sources.
 - Use pesticides only when and where they are needed.
6. Read the Label, Follow the Label
 - Before using pesticides and fertilizers, know the do's and don'ts. The label is the law!
 - Keep children and pets away from pesticides.
 - Store and dispose of pesticides properly.

7. Feed the Lawn

- Proper fertilization improves turf quality and stand density.
- Increased turf density reduces soil erosion and prevents weed problems.
- Fertilize in the fall for root growth and again in the spring using slow release nitrogen (N) fertilizer if soil test results indicate need.
- Avoid “weed and feed” type products since the herbicide component is often not necessary.
- Always apply fertilizer at the spreader setting shown on the bag.
- Sweep any fertilizer off hard surfaces and back onto the lawn.
- Do not apply fertilizer to frozen ground.
- Maintain a fertilizer-free zone around the edges of lakes and streams.

8. Mowing Matters

- Cut the lawn at the highest recommended mower setting for its intended use, usually 3”.
- Use a mulching mower, if possible. Keep mower blades sharp.
- Do not cut more than 1/3 of grass height at each mowing.
- Leave the mowing clippings in place to return nitrogen (N) and organic matter to the soil.
- Mow when turf is dry. Do not mow drought stressed or dormant grass which can damage the turf.

9. Routine Maintenance

- Scout for and monitor changes; record incidences of weeds, diseases and insect pests in turf.
- Establish a management plan for long-term success based on thresholds and treatment options.
- Maintain proper soil pH (6.0–6.5); test soil every 3–5 years on moderate-care turf.
- Reduce thatch, if needed, to reduce incidence of some disease and insect infestations.
- Aerate once every other year, or more often if site is heavily used (such as playground areas).
- Overseed thin spots and reseed bare soil. Early fall is the best time.