

A photograph of a well-maintained garden. In the foreground, a stone fountain with a small waterfall flows into a circular basin. A path of reddish-brown stepping stones winds through a green lawn. The garden is filled with various plants, including purple flowers, blue hydrangeas, and a large pink succulent. In the background, there are large trees with green and yellowing leaves, and a wooden fence.

# An Introduction to WaterWise Lawn Care

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## Why Waterwise Landscaping?

Our landscapes are a reflection of who we are. They can add great value to our properties, be a place for relaxation, and a source of pride for the whole family.

For decades, we have been conditioned to look after our landscapes with excessive use of fertilizers, pesticides and water in order to achieve maximum results. However, by planning your landscapes properly, you can reduce or eliminate the need for these while maintaining a healthy landscape.

Being more in tune with the environment and planting for the natural environment and local climate will reduce the amount of maintenance your garden and grass needs, giving you more time to relax and enjoy your landscape.

## Our Environment

Like many locations of similar latitude, Abbotsford and Mission have four distinct seasons. However, our proximity to the Pacific Ocean provides milder winters, along with much greater winter rainfall than inland areas. Summer on the west coast is known for its relative dryness. It is not uncommon to receive little or no rainfall for weeks at a time. August averages only 20% of November's rainfall.

## Protecting the Resource

Like most municipalities, Abbotsford and Mission have water restrictions that come in to effect from May through September. This ensures that the community has enough water in the reservoirs for emergency situations and that all residents have access to adequate amounts of clean water for drinking and daily activities through the summer months when water usage is known to be higher.

Water restrictions are set in escalating stages to reflect the level of Dickson Lake, the main source of drinking water for Abbotsford and Mission. When the lake level begins to fall, water restriction stages go higher to limit the amount of water used for lawn sprinkling and for other outdoor uses.



## Waterwise Lawn Care

Allowing your grass to go dormant over the summer is the easiest and most water wise option for lawn care. However, if you choose to maintain a green lawn during the hot, dry season, here are a few tips to maximize the health of your lawn while still watering within the restrictions.

### Establishment

Grass seed requires consistent moisture and a mild temperature in order to sprout, which is why the best time to establish a new lawn is in the early autumn. Even if you are laying down sod, the young roots will grow much faster in cool weather with increased rainfall.

Don't wait until the spring or summer to start a new lawn – water evaporates quickly from bare soil in the heat and it is not possible to maintain an evenly damp soil surface while still watering within the restrictions. Turf grasses are not considered fully established until one full year after planting, and are more vulnerable to environmental stresses until they reach maturity.



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### Lime

Apply lime twice a year, in the spring and fall. Lime is alkaline and helps to neutralize the pH of the soil, as soil in the Fraser Valley is naturally acidic and grass grows best at a neutral pH. There are different types of lime, but dolomitic lime has the added benefits of being high in magnesium and calcium, which are necessary for heat and drought resistant lawns. Because of the complex interactions between nutrient availability and pH, it is always a good idea to perform a yearly soil test in the fall to determine the amount and type of lime to apply.



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## Aerate

As lawns are often used for recreation, the soil underneath can become compacted with foot traffic. Roots can't grow properly in compacted soil, so it is important to aerate once a year in the early fall or spring. Do not aerate in wet soil, as this will damage the soil's structure. After aerating, leave the plugs to dry for a few days, spread a thin layer of coarse sand over the lawn, and rake in thoroughly. At this point you can also spread a thin layer of compost on your lawn to give it an added boost of nutrients to encourage strong growth.



*Micro clover seed needs less water than grass, and also fixes nitrogen from the air into the soil.*

## Seed

Overseed, preferably with a locally made turf blend appropriate for your lawn's conditions and intended uses. There are many good quality low maintenance, drought-tolerant mixes available. You can also overseed with micro clover, which looks like turf when mowed and requires little water and stays green in the winter. Micro clover needs less water than grass, and also fixes nitrogen from the air into the soil, so you do not have to fertilize clover lawns (they fertilize themselves!).

**QUICK  
Fact**  
✓

***A well-cared for lawn should not need pesticides or frequent watering. A healthy lawn will have strong, vigorous roots that will withstand dry periods, out-compete weeds and be better able to survive counter attacks by pest and disease than those that are chemically treated.***

## Feed

One of the most effective things you can do for your turf lawn is applying compost or compost tea, which you can purchase or make yourself. Compost acts as a natural fertilizer full of important nutrients, and improves the microbiological activity of soil. Compost has been proven to show increased disease and environmental stress resistance in turf, with the added benefit of being harmless to people, animals, and the environment. It eliminates the need for pesticides or synthetic fertilizers.



*One of the best things you can do for your turf lawn is to apply compost*

## De-thatch

Over time, grass stems and roots form an anaerobic, compacted layer called thatch. Thatch impedes the soil's ability to absorb water and nutrients, so this layer should be broken up once a year in the late spring or early fall. For smaller yards, a manual de-thatching rake should do the trick. For larger properties you may want to consider renting a machine or hiring a lawn-care professional.



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## Mow

Maintaining a higher cut helps grass to grow long roots that are more effective at seeking out water. Aim for 3" (5-8cm). Remember to never remove more than 1/3 of the grass length at one time – this stresses and weakens turf. Grass-cycling (leaving clippings on the lawn) acts as a slow-release fertilizer and natural mulch for the lawn, adding nutrients and reducing water evaporation.



*Maintaining a higher cut helps grass to grow long roots that are more effective at seeking out water.*



*Regularly removing weeds before they have a chance to flower is the best way to keep lawns healthy.*

## Weed

Regularly removing weeds manually before they have a chance to flower is the best way to reduce the amount of weeds in your lawn. Once the weed has been pulled out, top dress the bare area with soil and overseed to establish turf grass in its place – a healthy lawn will out-compete any weed!

## Water Wisely

Lawns only need 2.5 cm (1 inch) of water per week in order to stay green over summer. This equates to about 1 hour per week of watering. It is a good idea to use a rain gauge or tuna can so you know how much water to supplement if the weekly rainfall is not sufficient. If you are going to irrigate your lawn, try to water deeply and infrequently to encourage root elongation and drought-tolerance. Watering too frequently will leach important nutrients from the soil, keep roots near the soil surface where they can easily be burned or dried out, and results in excess thatch build-up and weak, unhealthy turf.



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## Lawn Alternatives

Grass isn't the only groundcover! Depending on your lawn's sun exposure and foot traffic levels, there are a variety of water wise alternatives. Try a thyme lawn for small, sunny front yards with a paving stone walkway for a beautiful, scented, low water-use groundcover. Or, for shady wet sites, a mixture of mosses looks green all year and tolerates some foot traffic as well. There are many examples of "tapestry" lawns that combine a variety of low-growing groundcovers suitable for lawn alternatives on [www.growgreenguide.ca](http://www.growgreenguide.ca).



*Thyme is a great grass alternative and makes a beautiful, fragrant ground cover.*

# Seasonal Lawn Care Calendar

WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL
<p>Winterize your lawn mower – sharpen mower blades, change the oil and drain gasoline responsibly. If you have an electric mower, clean and sharpen the blades and remove the battery.</p> <p>Keep lawn free of leaves and twigs and avoid walking on lawn when wet – this can compact the soil.</p> <p>Start planning your spring and summer lawn-care goals!</p>	<p>Test soil pH and nutrients to determine if lime or compost should be added.</p> <p>Aerate, de-thatch and top dress with a thin layer of coarse sand and compost.</p> <p>Begin mowing your lawn weekly at a high cut height (3 in or 5-6 cm) and leave grass clippings on the lawn as a source of nutrients.</p>	<p>Consider a golden lawn for summer! It's the easiest, least expensive, and most eco-friendly option.</p> <p>If you choose to water your lawn, use a rain gauge to measure how much rain your lawn gets per week – remember it only needs 1" (one hour) of sprinkling a week, and ensure you water within the restrictions.</p> <p>Continue to mow your lawn at a high cut height (3 in or 5-6 cm) and leave grass clippings on the lawn.</p>	<p>Aerate, de-thatch (if you haven't already in spring), and top dress with a thin layer of coarse sand and compost.</p> <p>Apply lime.</p> <p>Rake leaves to prevent turf diseases.</p> <p>Overseed any areas that are worn out.</p>

## LANDSCAPE & IRRIGATION WATERWISE EFFICIENCY PROGRAM

This program offers free irrigation and landscape assessments to Abbotsford and Mission residents. During this session, you will learn how to make your landscape more water efficient, how to amend your soil and get recommendations for making your irrigation system more efficient. If you amend your soil, plant waterwise plants, or install a climate-based irrigation controller, you will be eligible to apply for up to \$250 in rebates. You need to sign up for an assessment before you apply for the rebates. To apply, or find out more, visit [ourwatermatters.ca](http://ourwatermatters.ca).





For more information  
on water conservation visit  
[ourwatermatters.ca](http://ourwatermatters.ca)

