Organic Lawn and Plant Care

The Key to a Successful Organic Lawn Program is the Soil

• It must be alive with beneficial micro organisms.

• Organisms in the soil have the same needs we do:
To drink, breathe, eat, digest and excrete.

• When the soil is healthy, fed with natural materials and not compacted,
the natural processes allow fertilization and growth
to happen the way Mother Nature intended.

• Beneficial microbes both feed and help protect turf and plants
from disease causing microbes.

• Organic fertilizer and amendments nourish the beneficial organisms,
whereas chemical fertilizers feed the plant directly.

• Much of the chemical fertilizer is not absorbed into the plant and runs off
Into lakes, rivers, reservoirs, groundwater and oceans.

• Growing grasses and other plants in healthy, living soil will
make the plants more drought-tolerant and disease and pest resistant.

Organic Lawn Care 101

The world of science has now joined forces with the organic movement to offer easy to use, highly effective alternatives to petro-chemical fertilizers and toxic poisons. Many homeowners use readily available 4 or 6 step chemical programs for their lawns and do not realize the danger this causes to their own health and the health of their children, their pets, and the environment as a whole.

Healthy turf grass in healthy soil will crowd out other plants,

out-competing them for nutrients, light, and water.

FEED THE SOIL AND THE SOIL WILL FEED THE PLANTS

Healthy soil is the basis for healthy plant life. More than a structural material to hold plants up, your soil is a living thing. Nutrients and minerals are bound into soil particles, released by the breaking down of organic matter by soil microbes and beneficial insects. In order to maintain healthy soil you must maintain a high level of organic matter and encourage essential soil life.

As with any other gardening endeavor, when growing an organic lawn, the soil is key.

Remember, a lawn is nothing more than a very short garden of grass plants!

Chemical fertilizers feed the soil with synthetic nutrients without providing the substance of organic matter necessary to maintain soil health. Insecticides, herbicides, and soil chemicals destroy any soil life that may have existed. Eventually, the result is a "dead" soil that must constantly be fed with artificial nutrients. Compare it to humans living on vitamin pills instead of real food!

As an alternative, use lawn fertilizers from natural sources, meant to enrich the life in the soil, increase microbial action, thus releasing nutrients slowly. This maximizes nutrient uptake of the plant and reduces the amount of nutrients leached away or fixed in the soil.

Some key ways to build healthy soil include using a mulching mower and returning the clippings to the lawn, adding organic fertilizers in spring and fall, and foliar feeding with liquids such as seaweed and other microbial solutions. If you are transitioning your lawn from chemical feeding to organic feeding, it will take more inputs in the beginning and less as the life in the soil grows and develops. There may be a period of time in the beginning when your lawn looks pale or sick. Do not get discouraged.

A healthy soil ecosystem takes time to develop!

Source written by :Nancy DuBrule-Clemente of Natureworks Horticultural Services, LLC.

Organic lawn care uses a natural approach

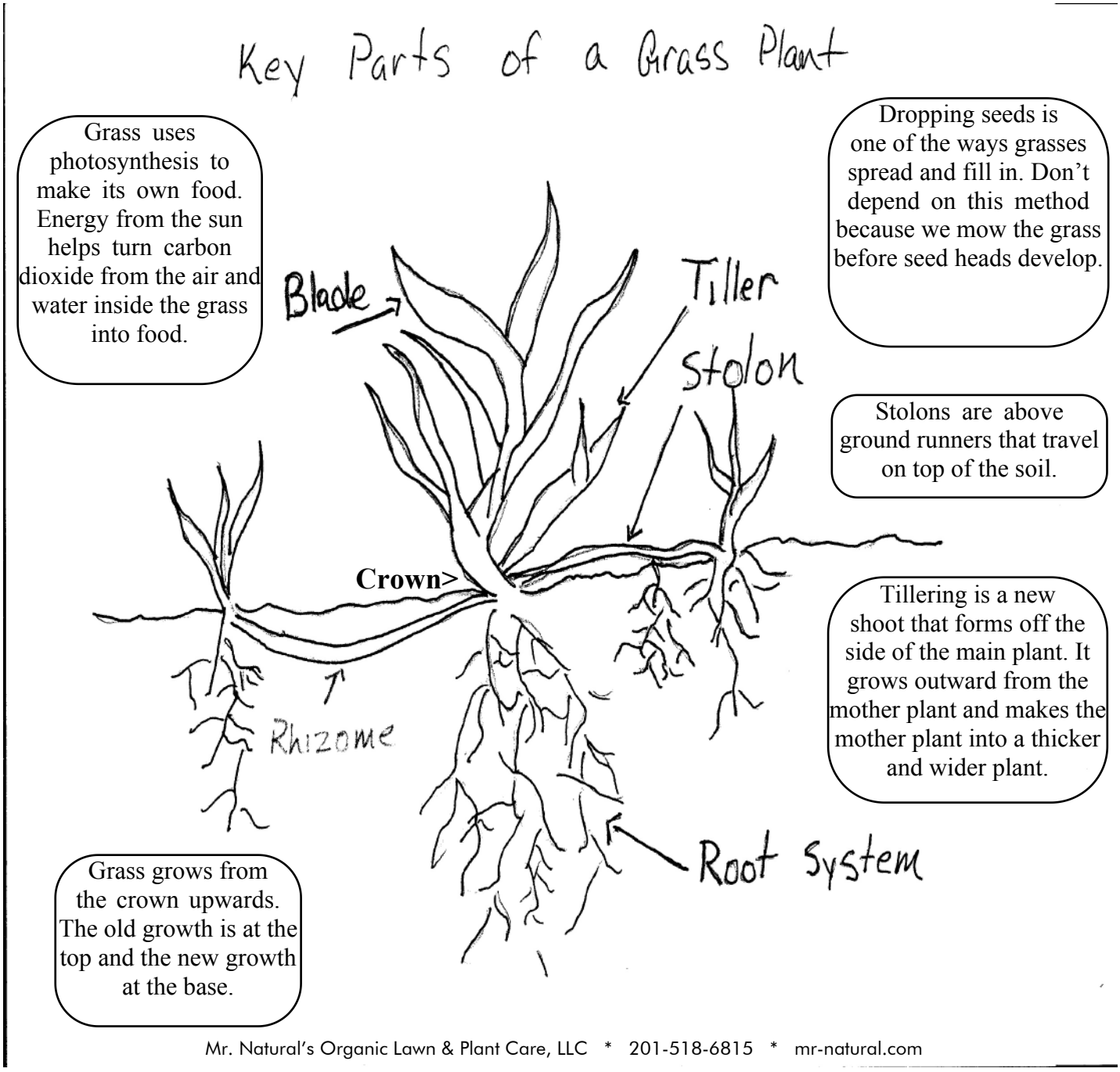
to maintaining your landscape without chemicals.

Building healthy soil and creating a healthy ecosystem

is vital to having a natural safe lawn for all to enjoy.

Know Your Grass

A healthy lawn growing in healthy soil will have a nice color, crowd out many weeds and will be highly resistant to disease and insects.



Optimal Mowing

If you are mowing incorrectly, changing to a proper mowing technique will give you a better looking lawn in a matter of weeks. Because grass makes its own food in the leaf blades, every time you mow the lawn you are cutting off some of the food factory of the grass. When the grass is cut too short all plant energy goes into rebuilding the grass blade. All functions end until the grass is long enough to make its own food again. In this condition the grass is in a weakened state and more susceptible to pests and diseases.

Northeastern cool season grasses should be cut no shorter than 3 inches high. The optimal cutting height should be no more than 1/3 of the height of the grass blade.

For example: If your grass is 4 ½ inches high, then it should be cut to 3 inches.

Understandably this is under perfect growing conditions. In the spring the shoot growth is much more rapid and this may be difficult to do. So you do the best you can, ideally you want the grass blades standing as upright as possible to maximize the grass blade surface area for photosynthesis. A little too high is always better than too short. But too high so that the grass is falling over will result in reduced airflow at the ground surface, creating conditions for disease. Remember, its how "even" grass looks after mowing that makes it look good, not how high it is.