



Natural Turf Management: A Systems Approach

Course Duration, Brief Description and Objectives

This is a one-day course, from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. The premise of the course is that a healthy organically maintained turf is more resilient, more drought-tolerant and more resistant to pest infestations than chemically maintained turf. Our instructor, Chip Osborne, will discuss in detail how to measure, develop and maintain healthy soil biology, how to maintain proper fertilization levels for optimum growth and plant health, how cultural practices should be altered for organic turf, and how to address specific pest problems without chemical pesticides. This will be taught so that attendees will gain a full understanding of the basic concepts of natural turf management and how these practices integrate with people and the environment.

Course Agenda

8:00 - 8:30 Registration

8:30 - 8:45 The Systems Approach to Natural Turf Management

The concept of a systems based approach as opposed to a product centered one will be explained at the outset. It is the alternative strategy of learning to manage the system that gives us the results we desire.

8:45 - 9:15 Conventional vs. Natural Turf Management: A Perspective

A brief discussion will outline the history and development of conventional turf management and an explanation about the fundamental differences between it and a natural approach. Reference will be made to why this strategy is good for Cape Cod.

9:15 - 10:15 Understanding Soil Biology

We will discuss and explain how the natural soil system works, and how it's different from chemical systems. We will discuss the role of healthy soil in promoting plant health, why microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, nematodes and protozoa) play a critical role, and how to measure this microbiology and other aspects of the soil (soil testing methods and how to read the reports). This section of the course is designed to help attendees understand that organic lawn care is not a matter of product substitution but a fundamental change in approach.



10:15 -10:30

Break

10:30-12:00

Turfgrass Nutrition and Soil Health - We will discuss techniques for developing and maintaining optimum soil quality. The balancing of ph is our first step.

Organic granular fertilizers and how they work, microbial inoculants, compost topdressing and compost tea will then be addressed as ways of feeding the soil to assist us in growing healthy vigorous turfgrass. Proper fertility at the right time of the season will assist in preventing many potential pest problems.

12:00 – 12:30

Lunch

1:00 - 2:00

Amended Cultural Practices for Natural Turf – We will discuss how various cultural practices should be altered in an organic lawn care program. Emphasis will be on mowing techniques (cut high), the importance of regular aeration (compaction is the number one enemy of turf grass) and how to manage irrigation for optimum results (too much water or water at the wrong time leads to fungal problems).

2:00 – 2:30

Choosing the Right Grass – Understanding grass genetics and individual strengths and weaknesses allows us to put the right plant in the right place. Grass selection is extremely important to the overall success of any turf system.

2:30 – 2:45

Break

2:45 – 3:45

Addressing Pests Without Chemicals - We will discuss the various types of pest problems common to turf in our area, and how they can be managed best without using chemical pesticides.

3:45 – 4:00

Questions