



It's all about organic matter.

Martin Oosterveld

During the last couple of weeks I have described natural lawn care and what products can help in developing a new way of looking after grass without the use of cosmetic pesticides. The most important ingredient in natural lawn care is a healthy soil. Organic matter content is the single most important measure of soil health.

How much organic matter is in your soil? I have suggested you take a soil sample to get a lab to tell you. Under natural grasslands the soil organic matter is actually quite high. What happens naturally is the process of photosynthesis takes carbon dioxide out of the air and combines this with nitrogen in the soil and with sufficient water, it creates carbon stored in blades of grass. If this grass is left to die and decompose, it turns into soil humus or organic matter.

Coming back to your own lawn, if you mulch your grass clippings, you are taking an important step in capturing carbon and turning it into soil organic matter. If you've got the right conditions, your grass clippings are decomposed by beneficial soil bacteria in about 2 weeks. In fact about half of the nitrogen required for growing grass in a season comes from recycling your grass clippings.

Over time you can build the organic matter content of your soil from a low value of about 2% to twice or three times that amount. Adding fertilizer stimulates this process. Both the clippings and decomposing roots add organic matter.

The decomposition comes from natural soil bacteria. Keeping the pH in the range of 6.5 to 7.0 keeps the soil bugs happy. You may have to raise or lower to get to this range.

Astute gardeners are always looking for other sources of organic matter to add to the soil. Your home composter is one source and it also reduces the waste you send to the landfill. Talking of landfill, the municipal sites in Collingwood and Town of the Blue Mountains have composting programs. I will be visiting one of these sites to get a trailer load of compost to top dress my lawn in the next couple of weeks. That takes locally produced compost back to the soil where it belongs.

If the weather cooperates over the next few days I will finish the spring clean-up in my yard. I am applying half of the annual dose of Amaizeingly Green fertilizer, about 4.5 kg per 1000 sq. ft. or 100 sq. m. I am now waiting about 3 weeks for the natural weed control of Amaizeingly Green to prevent the weed seeds from germinating. Then I will top dress with compost and seed the bare spots.

I do enjoy watching the birds establish their territories form my back deck. I like the fact that the soil they feed on is more natural for them and for us.

If you buy your Amaizeingly Green through any Rotarian you will contribute to our fundraising effort. See Rotarycolligwoodsgb.org or Amaizeinglygreen.ca for details. Make sure you quote the Rotary promotional code so we can continue to do our work in the community and around the world.

Martin Oosterveld Ph.D. is member of the Rotary Club of Collingwood South Georgian Bay.