

The Insider Tips & Tricks You Need to Be Given The Lawn YOU Deserve!

How to Have Your Dream Lawn

by John Liam
GreenLawnSecrets.com

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"I thank you for that!" – John Liam, Author

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CHAPTER 1:Introduction

[IMAGE] *The Greenlawns front yard*

Two families live right next door to each other, but their yards look like they exist in totally different universes.

The Greenlawn familys grass is lush, green, and has a well-manicured look to it. An oak tree native to the region spreads a canopy of neatly trimmed branches over a mulched* flowerbed with perennial flowers blooming in it. Underneath the living room window, sculpted bushes with fragrant flowers thrive. Bordering the sidewalk is another mulched bed, this one with freshly planted annual flowers in pleasant shades of white, lavender, and peach. As a member of Ann Greenlawns book club put it, I love it when we meet at her house because shes always got some new ornamental flower or landscaping touch shes added. Its such a beautiful place.

[IMAGE] *The Brownmud's front yard*

Next door, the Brownmuds lawn is another story. The original San Augustine grass planted when the house was built died years ago. A half-hearted attempt to sod* the yard by planting Bermuda grass seed went astray when a flood washed most of the seed away, resulting in four-foot-high grass in the low sections of the uneven yard and bare dirt on the high parts. In what remains of the original flowerbeds underneath the dining room window, thorny thistles rear their spiky heads and weeds grow unchecked. On a sunny afternoon in early spring, Bud Brownmud is standing out at his mailbox staring at his third warning letter from the GoodHomes Neighbourhood Association. Clean up your yard or well be forced to take legal action, it says.

Whose yard do you want yours to look like?

Bud crumples up the notice and clenches his jaw. As he storms back toward his home, he catches sight of his neighbour, Scott Greenlawn, fiddling with a lawnmower in the driveway. Buds never really talked to Scott muchhe figures the guys some goody-two shoes who paid a fortune to have a dream lawn put in and maintainedbut now hes peeved and wants to let off some steam.

Bud holds up the wadded-up notice and waves his arm. Do you believe this? The Neighbourhood Association is out to get me!

Raising an eyebrow, Scott leaves his lawnmower and wanders over. Trying to *get you?*

Yes." Bud frowned at the crumpled notice. "I got a letter that said something about not keeping up my yard. Can you believe it? What I do with my property should be my own business.

Scott tried hard to stifle a sigh and not let his eyes roll. The Brownbuds yard was a disaster, but they were still his neighbours. It was best to stay on good terms. And besides, if he gave the other man a few tips, perhaps Bud would do something about the weeds that kept straying into the Greenlawns yard Slowly, with a friendly smile, he said, Well, yes, its your business, but when you bought the house, didnt you sign some kind of paperwork, some kind of agreement with the Neighbourhood Association that youd keep up

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your yard?

A puzzled look came over Buds face. Idont remember. There was a stack of paperwork *this* highhe put his palms a few inches apartthat my wife and I had to sign. I suppose I should have read it all, but it wouldve taken all day, and I was in a hurry to get back to my job.

What do you do for a living? Scott asked.

Im a software developer over at XG Micro. My wife, Sheila, youve probably seen her out and aboutshe stays at home with our two children.

Scott nodded and smiled. You do well then.

I do all right. But not as well as you. Bud waved a hand at the Greenlawns yard. It looks as if youve spent a fortune on lawn care. How much does it cost to have a lawn like that installed and maintained every month?

[IMAGE] Laughing, Scott said, Im a tire salesman down at Dalton Tire. And my wife teaches third grade. Were not wealthy, not by any means. We couldnt afford to pay someone to install a lawn for us, so we did it ourselves, and we maintain it ourselves. The look of astonishment on Buds face prompted Scott to add, And that agreement you dont remember signing? It was a promise to keep up your yard to a minimum standard.

With a friendly smile, he added, You see, Bud, the condition of your yard affects my property value, your other neighbours property value, the people across the streets property valueeveryones. And even if no one's planning to sell anytime soon, having a nice lawn can give you a lot more pride in your home. In fact, every time my friends come by to pick me up for bowling, they compliment our yard, and I like that."

Bud gave Scott a questioning look. Soyouthink Sheila and I couldwe could fix this lawn *ourselves*?

I think you could."

But where would we start?

After taking a closer look at the Brownmuds yard, Scott replied, with as much diplomacy as he could muster, Well, in the shape its in, wed probably need to start over.

We? Hope bloomed on Buds face.

Yeah, *we*. Ill help you. Its not that hard, once you know what to do.

Bud shook his head doubtfully. I wouldnt know where to start.

Removing his arm, Scott bent down and scooped up a handful of bare dirt from Scotts yard. The first thing to do, usually, is to figure out what kind of soil youre dealing with. Fortunately for you, that problems already been solved.

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You tested your soil?

I didnt have to. Since were in a neighbourhood, I was fairly sure that lots of other people had already done that. So I took a trip down the street to Great Hills Nursery and asked them about the soil in this area.

Thats good.

Actually, thats good news about bad soil, Scott said. Here in Austin, Texas, we straddle two distinctly different geographic regions with two totally different types of soil.

Bud laughed. Yes, your yard, and then mine, right?

With a grin, Scott replied, Not quite. Do you know about the Balcones fault line that runs under Interstate 35?

Oh, yes. Sheila and I took the children down into that cave in Georgetown to see it.

Well, that old fault linewhere the earth moved about 20,000 years agois the dividing line between rich, black, gumbo-like soil and chalky, alkaline pale soil.

Which one do we have?

Here on the west side of I-35, we have the second one. Its poor soil, really; best suited for ranch land, since the main things that want to grow in it are native weeds and cedar. Now, east of I-35 is the same geographic region as Houston and the gulf coastto grow tomatoes, all you have to do is throw some seeds out in front of you and step on them to push them into the soil. You can come back in a month and you'll have tomatoes. But that isnt where we live. Where we live, if you want a backyard garden, like the one Mrs. Leverett down the street has, you have to put in a bunch of organic compost* and other things and fertilize it.

Shaking his head, Bud remarked, That sounds like a lot of work.

It can be, at first. But once you get it set up, all you have to do is maintain it. And that can be a fun family activity that gets everybody outdoors, out in the sunshine and all that.

Bud thought about his own family life: his two girls usually parked in front of the TV, Sheila online e-mailing gossip to her friendsthey could use a family activity. OK, so weve got poor alkaline soil around here. How do we fix that? And how much is all this going to cost me?

Well, first, we probably should make some sort of plan for what were going to do, Scott suggested. He tilted his head towards his open garage door. Come on into my workshop and lets write down a few ideas so we can get a rough estimate on costs.

The two men went in and sat down at Scotts workbench. On a white notepad, Scott started making notes. All right, since we know the soil type, the next thing we have to do is pull out big weeds by hand, and get your yard tilled up.

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I tried pulling weeds, Bud explained, but they just broke right off. I couldn't get the root. Am I going to have to use a shovel?

You can, or you can wait until it rains, or water your yard thoroughly. When the grounds saturated, you can pull those weeds up, root and all, with no trouble.

Tilling* sounds expensive.

Scott shook his head. It's not. We can borrow Mrs. Leverett's five-horsepower rototiller.* She might want you to cut her grass for her in return, or something, but you can do that, right?

Um, yes, but this is starting to sound like a lot of back-breaking work!

[IMAGE] I wouldn't call it back-breaking since I've been doing it and my back hasn't broke yet, but in the beginning, it does take a fair amount of physical work. But let me ask you this: do you pay money to belong to a health club or gym?

Flexing his bicep, Bud answered, I try to make it to the health club twice a week, yes.

How much does it cost?

Bud told him.

Smiling, Scott said, Then that's some money that you're going to save. Tell the club you're quitting to join the Lawn Care Gym. Putting in and keeping up a nice lawn is good exercise!

The corners of Bud's mouth slowly turned up. Very well, I have to admit, this is sounding better and better: a yard like yours, an activity that brings my family together, and a good, hard workout for free. You've got me sold. So what do we do after we pull out the weeds and till up my yard? Plant corn or something?

We could, if you want a stand of six-foot-high (2-meter-high) corn for a yard. Scott chuckled. Seriously, though, we need to start thinking about what kind of landscaping you're going to want.

Oh, no landscaping! I don't have that kind of money, Bud protested as he put up his hands.

No, no, no. I'm not talking about having a commercial crew come out with their big trailer, fancy uniforms, loud leaf-blowers, and king-sized bill. I'm talking do-it-yourself landscaping.

Bud gave Scott an appraising look. You know about that stuff?

Gesturing towards his lush, well-cared-for lawn, Scott said, The proof is in the pudding. My wife, Ann, and I planned *this*, and my sons and I put it in.

Wow," Bud exhaled heavily. Landscaping. It sounds overwhelming. I don't even know where to start.

In a helpful tone, Scott suggested, Well, what kinds of things would you like to have in your yard? For instance, does Sheila like to cook?

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Oh, yeah, shes got all these recipes shes always trying. Fresh herbs and all that.

Great! So you might want to have a little herb garden right outside the front door. That way, she can get the freshest herbs possible just by stepping outside her front door and picking a little basil, some cilantro, maybe a sprig of rosemary or thymewhatever her recipe calls for.

Yesshed love that, Bud said enthusiastically. And you know another thing shed like? Shes said how she likes seeing all those flowers you have in your yard. Could we do a flowerbed, too?

We certainly could.

A frown stole onto Buds face. Butwait a minuteall of this is going to drive up my water bill, isnt it? And Ill have to stand outside holding a hose, or keep running out to turn a sprinkler off and on, wont I?

It might, Scott admitted. But if the Neighbourhood Association comes after youhe indicated the balled-up notice Bud had set on the workbenchits going to cost a lot more to hire a lawyer, dont you think?

Bud swallowed. Yes.

And besides; as long as we have to till up your yard, we might as well put in a sprinkler system to irrigate and water it. We can do that ourselves with some PVC pipe and a timer. Then you wont have to waste time with hoses or sprinklers.

[IMAGE] All right, Bud agreed. Youve convinced me. But once we do this, how do I keep the weeds and the bugs out?

Slow downlet's take this one step at a time. The first thing we have to do is figure out what kind of grass you want. Then well measure your yard and make a scaled-down sketchnothing too fancy, just a working map of what goes where. This isnt rocket science, but we do need a plan. Then well pull up the weeds, till your yard, maybe get your soil tested to see if its been treated with anything harmful, fertilize it if we need to, till it up again to mix in the fertilizer, dig some trenches, lay in the sprinkler system, outline the flower and herb beds, sod* or seed the lawn, plant the beds, and mulch them. He stopped to catch his breath.

Buds eyes opened wider. Thats a lot of work.

It is, so you might as well go cancel that gym membership right now, Scott said with a laugh.

All right, I will, Bud agreed. He stood up to leave, then turned back to face Scott. Say, I know I havent always been the best neighbour or anything even close to it. SoI really appreciate your help.

It's all right," Scott replied. "So when do you want to get started on planning your new yard?"

Glancing at his watch, Bud said, Well, dinners not for another hourdo you have time now?

I have time now. Let me grab my tape measure and well get some numbers, then well sit down with the sketchpad.

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Its a deal. Bud stuck out his hand. Thanks.

Sure.

They shook hands.

Just then, a car pulled up to the curb and Scotts teen-aged son, Adam, stepped out. Thanks for the ride, Mrs. Haynes, he called back over his shoulder as he walked up the driveway with his spiked track shoes slung over his shoulder. Hey Dad, he said to Scott, do you want me to aerate the yard today, or should I put my spikes up?

[IMAGE] Bud looked back and forth between Scott and Adam with a look of disbelief. What do track spikes have to do with aerating your yard?

With a smile, Scott replied, You may as well sit down. Youve got a lot to learn about lawn care.

Read on, and you'll learn how to achieve your dream lawn.

CHAPTER 2: General Background

Bud Brownmud had never given lawn care much thought that's why he got nasty letters from the neighbours and from the neighbourhood association about his lawn.

On the other hand, Scott Greenlawn and his family took pride in their lawn, and made it a family affair: every weekend in the spring and summer, Scott would cut the grass while his wife edged around the borders and his children pulled out weeds.

As we've seen from the Greenlawns and the Brownmuds, the difference between putting time and effort into installing and upkeeping a nice-looking yard and just letting it go can have all sorts of consequences. These consequences can range from dirty looks from people walking down the street to in some cases actual property seizure and resulting eviction if you happen to live in a neighbourhood with a particularly draconian Homeowners Association.

Why does having a healthy lawn matter? Because when a lawn is properly managed, it can offer big benefits to people and the environment. Well-managed lawns are an environmental asset. They can help protect or even improve water quality. On the other hand, poorly-managed lawns whether by neglect or through the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides can be an environmental liability.

How you and your neighbours take care of your lawns matters. It's up to you whether or not that land is used to enhance our environment. It means being aware that small acts such as not washing grass clippings into the street or down sewer drains can have a big impact on our streams and lakes.

Healthy lawns provide many benefits:

§ Lower air conditioning bills. Moisture evaporating from grass leaves helps keep air temperatures cooler.

§ Less pollution. Lawns can help filter pollutants out of the air and reduce noise pollution, especially when used with physical barriers.

§ Higher property values. Attractive lawns contribute to the overall appearance of a community's landscape.

§ A place to play. Grasses are the only plants that can stand up to repeated recreational use.

§ Better water quality. The thick sod* formed by grasses helps water soak into the ground. This helps reduce or eliminate runoff* that can carry soil or other contaminants into waterways.

You can reap most of these benefits without spending much money or taking more time than you're likely spending already on maintaining your lawn.

To help you better understand your lawn, there are three questions you should ask yourself. First, what kind of climate is your lawn growing in? Second, what kind of soil (ground) do you have? And third, what kind of grass that grows well (in your particular climate and in the type of soil you have) do you want to have? The answers to all three of these questions can have a dramatic influence on your lawn. For this reason, it is necessary to understand each of these areas before you proceed to the other areas.

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[IMAGE]

The first thing you'll want to assess is the climate in which you live. Are you in an arid desert region with sandy soil where only a few hardy types of grass will survive? Or do you live in a lush tropical area with rich soil, where the biggest problem might be narrowing down the choices of grass and keeping out weeds? Maybe you live in a temperate climate like Scott and Bud do, with soil that could be either acidic or alkaline, and you have your pick of a fair assortment of grasses for a lawn.

Most of us have a good idea of what kind of climate we live in simply because, well, we live in it. So does your lawn. But unlike you, your lawn can't turn on the air conditioning when it's too hot or put on a coat when it's too cold. Therefore, it's important to understand the impact that your climate will have on your lawn, and what lawn is best suited for your climate and needs.

Grasses, too, are categorized as either Warm-Season or Cool-Season grasses to better describe the weather in which they flourish. This should help you learn what kinds of grass are commonly grown in your zone. Then you can decide which one best fits your needs.

Here are a few examples of popular grasses:

[IMAGE] [IMAGE] [IMAGE]
San Augustine Bermuda Bahia

There's an old gardener's joke that "soil" is what you grow your plants in and "dirt" is what's under your fingernails. Seriously, though, *everything* begins with the soil. Once you understand the basics of soil science and begin to apply what you've learned, plants will start to grow much better for you. Regardless of the climate you live in, growing conditions can usually be improved if you mix in organic material with your existing soil. The most commonly used soil amendments are peat moss,* mushroom manure,* and sand.

A Few Quick tips for Getting Started:

Mow high. The shorter you mow your lawn, the more work you will need to do to keep it looking good. Never cut more than a third of the plant when you mow. If you want to keep your lawn mowed to just 2 cm (0.75 in.) that means mowing every 2 to 5 days. That's a lot of work. Mowing that close can weaken root systems (making the grass more prone to pests and drought,) and makes it easier for weeds to overtake the grass. Mowing your lawn to a 7 or 8 cm (2.75 or 3 in.) height helps grass keep the weeds out. It means mowing when the grass reaches 8 cm (3 in.) or every 5 to 15 days, depending on growth rates.

Keep your mower blade sharp. Dull blades* tear grass instead of cutting it. Lawns mowed with dull blades use 30 percent more water. Plus the wounds created by dull blades allow disease pathogens to enter grass plants. File your blade regularly and replace damaged blades.

[IMAGE] **Leave the clippings.** Clippings do not create thatch or mulch,* contrary to popular belief. If you cut only a third of the plant at each mowing, the clippings won't smother the grass either. Mulching mowers work best to chop up clippings so they can work their way through the grass and onto the soil surface. There, earthworms incorporate clippings into the soil, improving both its drainage after storms and its ability to hold water during droughts. Do not disperse clippings onto pavement or into gutters.

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They are high in phosphorus and can cause pollution when they're washed into storm sewers and enter streams and lakes.

Don't fertilize early. Fertilizing in early spring only causes extra stress on grass plants over the long term by encouraging excessive top growth at the expense of their roots. (Do not apply fertilizer to frozen soil, saturated soil, or on top of snow. It's a waste of fertilizer and a sure way to have it wash into streams and lakes, thereby polluting the environment.) A better strategy is to fertilize in the fall, from early in the season until about 2 weeks after the last mowing. Plants will use this fertilizer to develop root reserves to help them survive through winter and get off to a healthy start next spring.

Watch your water. It's easy to do more harm than good. Never water at night. Wet grass invites diseases. Water between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m. when the leaves will dry quickly in the morning sun. During extended drought, stop watering and allow grass to go dormant.

Special care in the shade. Grass needs a minimum of 4 hours of direct sun -- 6 hours if it gets much foot traffic. Consider other ground covers if your lawn receives less than this. In shady spots, plant fine fescues that are adapted to lower light. Mow high and reduce fertilizer.

Spray sparingly. Never use lawn insecticides without checking to see if the problem really requires treatment. Seventy-five percent of lawn insecticide applications in urban areas are unnecessary or ineffective. Manage your grass properly for healthy root systems that can tolerate some insect damage and remain aesthetically pleasing.

Fill in weak spots. Use a rake to work up and improve the soil where weeds flourish or where the ground is bare. Then re-seed with the grass varieties that are best suited to the site. If, after a season of mowing high and leaving the clippings (taller grass will help shade out weeds,) your lawn is still over fifty-percent perennial weeds and bare spots, consider a complete renovation of your lawn.

The further chapters are:

- Chapter 3: Soil Types
- Chapter 4: Seeding or Sodding
- Chapter 5: Climate
- Chapter 6: Grass Types
- Chapter 7: Nutrition Requirements
- Chapter 8: Water Requirements
- Chapter 9: Aeration Requirements
- Chapter 10: General Lawn Care Maintenance
- Chapter 11: Weed Control
- Chapter 12: Pest Control
- Chapter 13: Maintenance & Equipment
- Chapter 14: Frequent Problems Answered
- Chapter 15: Success Stories: Disaster to Dream

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