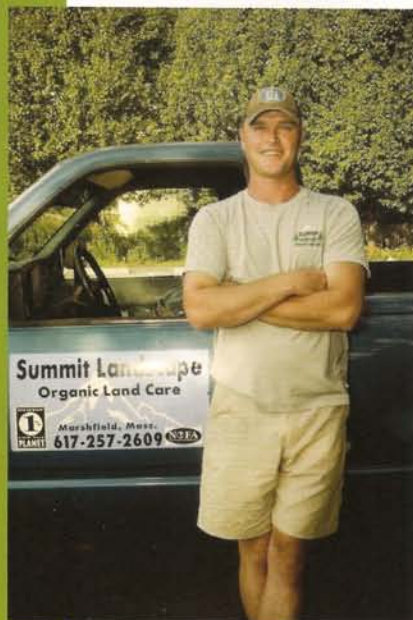


Summit Landscape

ORGANIC LAND CARE



Dave Macdonald founded Summit Landscape in 2004 with a desire to work in the outdoors and stay true to his mindset about the environment. Soon after, he took the five-day Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) course to become a certified organic land care professional. This 30-hour course covers all aspects of organic land care – from soil health, site analysis and planting/plant care to composting, lawn alternatives and running a business. Macdonald must take approved continuing education courses on an annual basis to keep his status active. “In an organic program, we are trying to restore, rebuild what has been lost in the soil from conventional fertilizers and possibly site construction and runoff,” Macdonald said, adding that every property is different and soil conditions vary greatly. That’s why he takes soil samples at all new properties under his care and sends them to UMass-Amherst for analysis. The resulting detailed report gives him the information he needs to chart a plan of action.

Organic lawn care “is a process, not an event,” Macdonald stresses, especially for properties that have been chemically treated for many years. It takes time to restore the soil to a healthy state, and the resulting lawn can be lush and green depending on the applications and budget. “I feel that an organic mindset should be tolerant of plant diversity and not have the expectation of a monoculture – a single plant covering the lawn.” Many of his current customers have come to organic lawn care as a result of lifestyle. They’re educating themselves about diet and exercise and the environment at large and realize that “the poisons being put on a property counteract all of that,” he said. Since 2006, Macdonald has been a member of 1% for the Planet, an organization that has inspired members of the business community to contribute 1% of sales to environmental groups around the world. Summit Landscape has made donations to NOFA and Holly Hill Farm in Cohasset, amongst others. He is also a member of the Ecological Landscaping Association and graduated from Maine Compost School in 2007.

Baseline organic lawn care services

Site analysis: Includes consultation, soil samples, and detailed soil report.

Organic fertilizer/soil conditioner: Applied twice a year, spring and fall. Calcitic lime is applied annually, as needed.

Other services

Organic mosquito and tick control:

Garlic concentrate that is sprayed once a month for mosquito control – more frequently for ticks.

Design and planting: A professional eye to help landscape your yard; knowledge of native plants.

Compost topdress and over seeding: To improve soil health, high-quality compost is applied on top of the soil and overseeded for maximum density of new grass

Tree and shrub care: Any trees or shrubs suffering from disease or in need of extra care benefit from a deep-root injection of compost tea and other soil amendments.

Consultations: Professional advice regarding the organic care of any aspect of your lawn, trees, shrubs, or garden.

Lawn renovations: Aeration, compost topdress, overseeding, slice seeding, and fertilization all play a role in rebuilding soil health.

Aeration: Aerator pulls small plugs of soil out of your lawn to lessen compaction and increase the amount of oxygen, water, and fertilizer that are able to penetrate.

Compost tea: Applied twice a year, spring and fall. Additional applications are op-

Summit Landscape, Organic Land Care

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Organic Land Care

By Kerri Macdonald



Most people who visit South River Veterinary Service in Marshfield are struck by the beauty of the lawn and garden.

"The grass is absolutely beautiful," says owner and veterinarian Jenny Maas. "It's lush. It's great to walk on. There's diversity of the grass, too – it's not a desert."

Maas, who started her business in 1981, has been at her Ocean Street location for the past 11 years. Initially she took care of the property herself and never used chemicals. But with more and more patients coming in, she had less time to devote to lawn care.

Maas became one of Summit Landscape's first customers in 2004. Her motivation was simple. "Number one, I wanted my clients to see that they don't need to put chemicals on their lawn to have a beautiful lawn. And, I wanted my patients to not be exposed to these chemicals."

In the past few years, Maas has seen an increasing number of pets (several per week) suffering from toxicity, contact dermatitis on their skin, immune-mediated diseases, and lymphoma. When she asks these pet owners if they have their lawn chemically treated, "unfortunately, about 80 to 90 percent of the time," they say yes. Although it's impossible to prove, Maas strongly suspects a causative relationship.

Mostly dogs contract these diseases, but others are not immune. Maas said she sees a lower percentage of cats with chemical-related illnesses



because so many owners keep them strictly indoors.

Of course, it's not just animals that are affected – people are as well, particularly children. A National Cancer Institute study found that children were up to six times more likely to get childhood leukemia when pesticides were used in the home and garden.

Marshfield residents Byron and Jean Drinkwater don't have pets or children living at home, but they do have a healthy lifestyle that encompasses everything from food to skincare products to lawn care. Jean has always had an organic garden, but their grass wasn't treated – chemically or otherwise. "We've never been lawn-crazy people," she said, adding that she looked at it as "green stuff we mowed."

After a house renovation left their 5,000-square-foot property with mostly dirt and a seeding job proved unsuccessful, they turned to Summit Landscape for help. That was in 2007. "The grass is softer, thicker, and healthier now," said Jean, who owns Woodacre Farm Soaps in Pembroke. "Anybody can walk out there – including the grandkids – without getting sick. You can't put any price on that."

"Year by year, it's gotten better," Byron added, pointing to the benefits of compost tea and other soil amendments.

Summit Landscape's organic program includes a minimum of two compost tea applications per year. Macdonald brews the tea in a 300-gallon tank by combining high-quality compost in water, adding a few other natural/organic ingredients – including unsulfured molasses, fish emulsion, and kelp -- and aerating the mixture for approximately 18 to 24 hours. He then transfers it to a spray rig and sprays it directly onto people's lawns. This increases the beneficial microorganisms that have been depleted from the soil, thereby making the grass stronger and healthier.

Jean Drinkwater finds it ironic that many people look at perfectly green, uniform, chemically-treated grass as healthy and have a hard time believing that an organic lawn such as hers can be so beautiful. "There's a lot of education that still needs to be done," she said.

The more chemicals people use, the more problems they have, Maas said. While chemicals kill the beneficial insects, the tougher ones, like fleas and ticks, survive. Maas feels strongly that the biodiversity in the soil, which is so important in an organic program, creates a healthy lawn. "A lawn is a living and changing thing – it's not a carpet you put down in the living room."

Maas credits Summit's organic program with really tuning in to her 6,000-square-foot property's unique needs. "Dave's been really good at helping us naturally get rid of crab grass and getting beetles under control," she said.

She describes the lawn as "fairly low maintenance." "We used to need to water it a lot, but now it retains its own moisture. It just maintains its own health."

An important part of this success, she knows, is not mowing too short. Leaving grass 3 to 3 ½ inches high is a tenet of organic lawn care. Doing so provides shade, conserves moisture, and keeps out weeds.

"It's a very welcoming place for all kinds of nesting birds and little critters. It's a lawn that probably anyone would love – neat, green, and lush."

Maas takes pride in the fact that she never has to keep her own dogs, or her patients' pets, off the lawn after an organic fertilization. "I care about my community," she said. "One should be suspicious of agribusiness. They really have no vested interest in keeping you healthy or your pet healthy."

People should stop putting chemicals on the earth, for everyone's sake, Maas believes. Use of chemicals "is not a sustainable thing," she said. "We have to start thinking of long-term solutions."

While she is excited by the number of positive changes she's seen lately in people's lifestyles and attitudes, there are many negatives as well – such as an increase in hyperthyroidism and renal disease in pets, and the effects of genetically modified food on pregnant women and their unborn babies. She said, "Meanwhile, the juggernaut of agribusiness continues to march forward."

As a veterinarian, Jenny Maas has no qualms about giving the following advice to her clients: "Stop putting this stuff on your lawn. It's making your pet sick."

