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Organic Lawn Care The Facts and Fallacies

You've seen the ad. The one with the turfgrass manager, chin in hand, looking at two bags of fertilizer—one marked organic, the other chemical. With a pond in the background, one is left with the impression that this person is agonizing over the decision to pollute the pond or not. Is the choice between organic and inorganic as difficult for you? More important, are your customers asking for organic lawn services? ■

There's no doubt that American consumers today are more aware of their health, as well as the impact materials used around the home have on the environment. Because the term "organic" normally conjures thoughts of "natural" and "safe" in most consumers' minds, the demand for organic lawn care programs has increased. Likewise, the number of organic products and lawn care providers has also increased.

While most lawn care professionals currently classify the organic market as a "niche market", many recognize it as one that is growing. As biological pest control products are developed, organic lawn care services will become even more attractive and competitive.

What is Organic?

A quick look in the dictionary reveals several definitions of organic. The most basic definition of organic is any carbon containing compound. Some of these compounds occur naturally (natural organic), while some are man-made (synthetic organic).

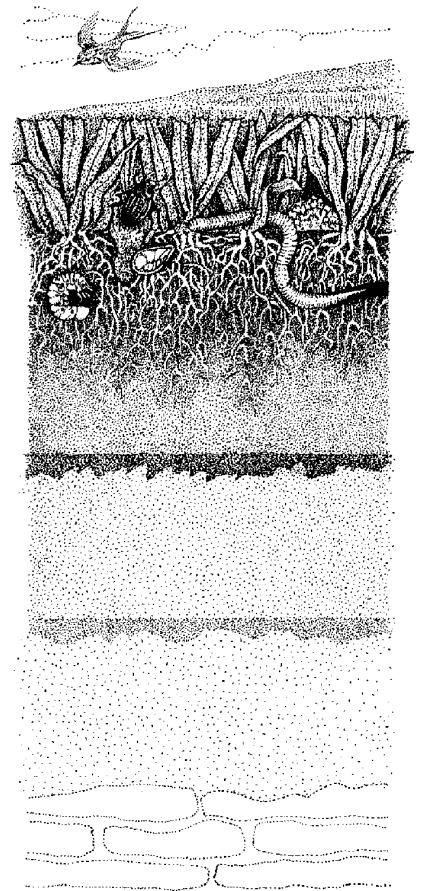
If you were to ask your customer to define organic, they would likely describe a natural

organic. True organic lawn care practitioners use natural products. In fact, certification standards for natural lawn care professionals have been developed by an ad-hoc group of the Natural Organic Farmers Association (NOFA).

There are some basic philosophical differences between natural organic and traditional lawn care programs. Practitioners of natural organic lawn care believe that the biotic character of the soil must be maintained. The organic matter in particular must be preserved because of its many benefits: nutrient and moisture holding abilities, soil aggregation, and the ability to support a diverse array of organisms. They further believe that using synthetic materials such as chemical fertilizers and pesticides will adversely affect the organic matter and the organisms it sustains. In fact, there is some documentation to support this. If the soil is healthy, the plant life it supports will be healthy as well.

Traditional lawn care programs have evolved to utilize the technologies and products developed that will produce attractive, lush,

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