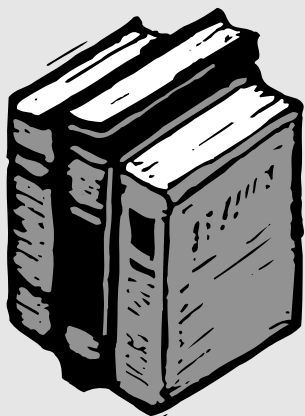


## On the Bookshelf

*Over the last year I have been on a mission to collect and read every lawn care book I could get my hands on at the major booksellers in the US, including web purveyors.*



# The Lawn Reader: Lawn Care Book Reviews

**E**ach year Cornell Cooperative Extension, as well as the Extension System throughout the country receives hundreds of thousands of calls regarding lawn care. As a System, we have been effective in developing bulletins, fact sheets, and now even web-based information. However, this pales in comparison to the economic juggernaut of garden books that deal specifically with lawn care. But how do you know which ones provide the best information? And more importantly as a commercial turf manager, which one would I recommend to my clients that will give them a good overview of the subject so that we can speak intelligently.

Over the last year I have been on a mission to collect and read every lawn care book I could get my hands on at the major booksellers in the US, including web purveyors. What follows is my personal, objective review (where possible I state if otherwise) of almost 20 books currently available on the subject of lawns. I have confined my comments to first provide an overview of the text, then discuss its strengths and weaknesses, and finally highlight the key aspects worthy of further investigation. I have categorized the books into either 1) traditional lawn care or 2) lawn alternatives. If you are aware of any good ones that I missed, please don't hesitate to let me know.

*Frank S. Rossi*

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### Traditional Lawn Care Books

#### Smart Yard: 60 Minute Lawn Care

Jeff and Liz Ball

1996, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, CO

ISBN 1-55591-138-2

A self-described approach as an “environmentally responsible, low maintenance” lawn care program, this easy to follow book provides an excellent overview of basic lawn care practices. It uses simple everyday language to convey some of the scientific basis for why we do certain things to our lawns. The emphasis on “Soil Comes First” is well-intentioned, however, many aspects could have been explained more effectively by combining several chapters into this one. In addition, the lawn assessment and problem solving sections are weak with limited graphics to assist with identification of specific problems.

#### Building a Healthy Lawn: A Safe and Natural Approach

Stuart Franklin

1988, Garden Way Publishing, Pownal VT

ISBN 0-88266-518-9

This Williamsville, NY based landscaper has provided an extremely wordy guide to providing a “healthy lawn that is an environmental healer.” This book is one of the most focused

on an overall healthy approach without being preachy about organic or non-chemical practices. However, it is dated, lacking in the latest information regarding selecting endophytic grasses for insect control. In addition, it is written in a conversational style that for me was difficult to translate into what I should be doing for my lawn. There is an interesting section on criteria for selecting a commercial lawn care service that touches on “guidelines for the future” that seems prophetic.

#### The Impatient Gardeners Lawn Book

Jerry Baker

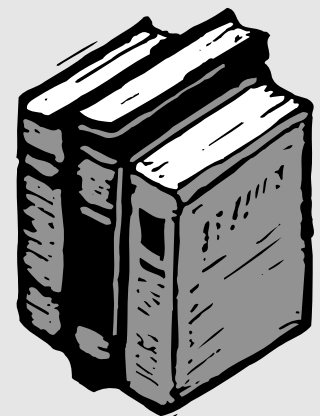
1987, Ballantine Books, NY

ISBN 0-345-34094-9

The self-proclaimed, “America’s Master Gardener,” delivers a wildly entertaining, occasionally informative, and very dated lawn care book. Jerry Baker is an experienced gardener and salesman, filling the book with specific product recommendations based on his allegiance at the time. The book has several strengths worth noting such as, a complete list of recommended grasses for every state in the US, a list of State Extension Service publications, as well as generic weather information, a good question and answer section, and an excellent section on establishing a lawn that addresses many overlooked topics such as seed rate and rolling. Still, in his problem solving section, the constant rec-

# On the Bookshelf

*“The Complete Idiot’s Guide to a Beautiful Lawn” is easily one of the three best books on lawn care currently on the market today. Ms. Gilmer provides an excellent addition to the “Idiot’s” series that is well organized, follows a logic flow and is filled with easy to read turf tips.*



ommendation for beer, tobacco juice, or lawn shampoo borders on the ridiculous. I say this not only because his obsession with thatch is overhyped, but research using his concoctions found them to be no more effective than the more traditional methods found in an Extension publication. Clearly, these additions are entertainment related.

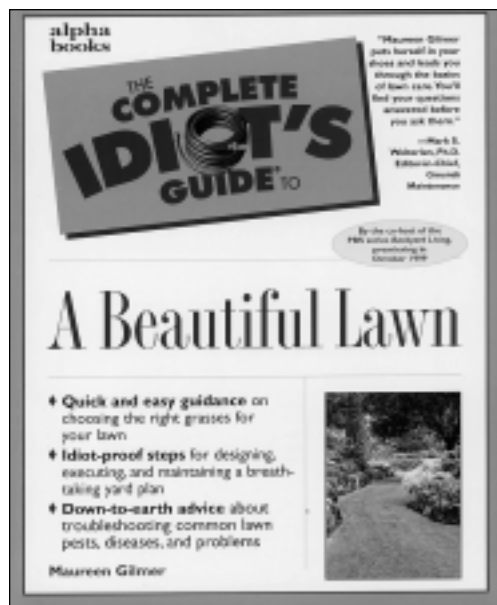
### The Complete Idiot’s Guide to a Beautiful Lawn

Maureen Gilmer

1999, Alpha Books, NY

ISBN 0-02-863008-4

Easily one of the three best books on lawn care currently on the market today. Ms. Gilmer provides an excellent addition to the “Idiot’s” series that is well organized, follows a logic flow and is filled with easy to read turf tips. From the three most common myths about turf (pollution, clippings and water) to being a savvy seed shopper this book belongs on every lawn care provider’s Christmas list for their customers. The only obvious weakness, as with many lawn care books, is the lack of a good diagnostic or problem solving section. The soil compaction chapter may be one of the best written, the pests sections are poor, lacking in graphics and providing limited options.



### The ‘New’ Lawn Expert

Dr. D.G. Hessayon

1997, Sterling Publishers, NY

ISBN 0-903505-48-7

Another installment of the British “Expert” series is filled with graphical representation of practices that should make the process seem easier, yet it left me confused. Several sections provide excellent information on grass and weed identification. However, many UK-specific recommendations would be disastrous in the US. For example, the author suggests that optimum mowing height is 1” and there is little or no suggestion to have soil tested. Only 20 pages are actually devoted to lawn care with the remaining sections discussing equipment, pests, and lawn alternatives. This is one of the most common, yet weakest books on lawn care.

### Lawns

Editors of Sunset Books and Magazines

1993, Sunset Publishing, CA

ISBN 0-376-03499-8

An 80 page booklet on lawn care that is very light on facts with little to no explanation of specific aspects of lawn care. While there are no mistakes in the text, it is written in a magazine article format that is easy to read but hard to connect into a lawn care program. Based in California, this booklet has the best irrigation chapter of any lawn book I reviewed from principles to practice; there is even a well outlined plan for installing an in-ground irrigation system. There are little if any problem solving sections and the pests sections do not provide good information on when you see certain problems.

### Ortho’s All About Lawns

Principal Writer: Warren Schultz

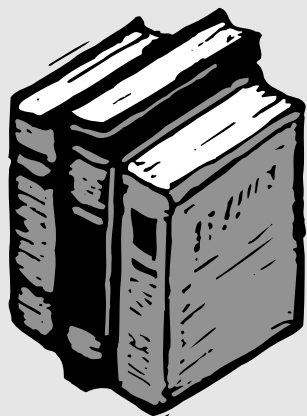
1999, Meredith Books, IA

ISBN 0-89721-421-8

A visually appealing addition to the Ortho series of garden booklets, filled with exceptional photographs and easy step by step procedures. One of the important strengths of this booklet is the availability of current grass variety and chemical recommendations. The lawn care section is a little bit of a let down, possibly because Monsanto does not have any products to sell in this area with the mowing, watering, and fertilizing section being fairly weak. That being said, the problem solving section is the best of any lawn book on the market. The photographs and graphical representations are exceptional

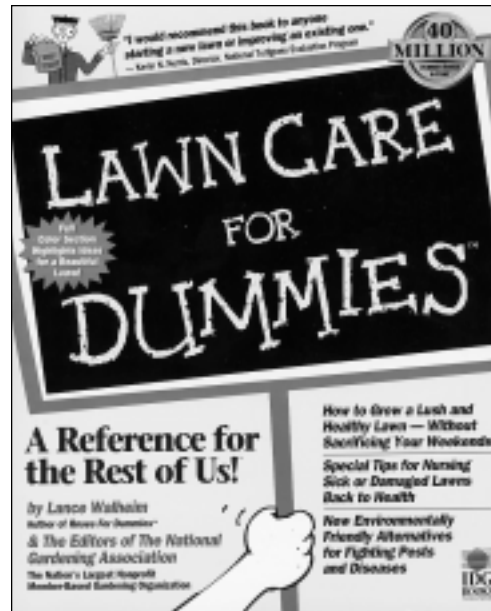
# On the Bookshelf

*“Lawn Care for Dummies” is similar in many ways to the Idiot’s Guide, in that it provides an easy to follow, well organized, and fact loaded format to get the “worst” gardener on the right track.*



## Lawn Care Book Reviews

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and many chemical and non-chemical options are provided. This is a must for lawn care providers providing IPM services for proper monitoring and identification.

**Lawns and Ground Covers: How to Select, Grow and Enjoy**  
 Michael MacCaskey  
 1982, HP Books  
 ISBN 0-89586-099-6

With only 50 pages devoted to lawn care, this terribly dated booklet does provide one of the best step by step descriptions of lawn installation using pictures. In addition, there is an excellent section on installing irrigation and the ground cover section appears to be thorough to the untrained (my own) eye. Still, there are so many other excellent texts for lawns and ground covers that this would not be one of my recommendations.

**Down to Earth Natural Lawn Care**  
 Dick Raymond  
 1993, Storey Communications  
 ISBN 0-88266-810-2

Dick Raymond’s book is filled with folksy, old lawn care practices that just might be the solution to most homeowner’s problems. In spite of the recent copyright date, much of the material seems dated and while the suggestion to eat dandelions rather than spray them seems goofy, Mr. Raymond does discuss various synthetic and organic options. One of the most useful sections for those hooked on the calen-

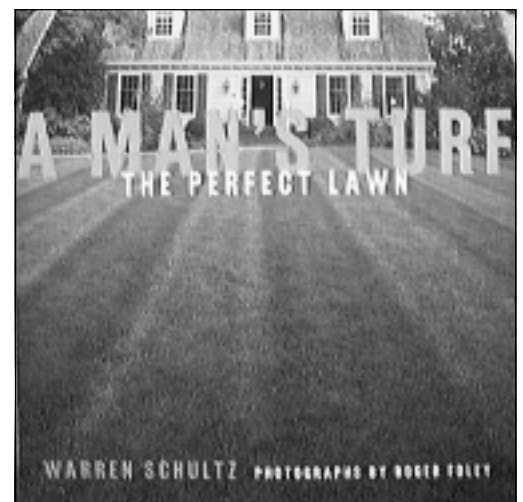
dar type approach, is the seasonal guide that Mr. Raymond provides for each region of the country.

**Lawn Care for Dummies**  
 Lance Walheim  
 1998, IDG Books, CA  
 ISBN 0-7645-5077-2

This addition to the “Dummies” series is similar in many ways to the Idiot’s Guide, in that it provides an easy to follow, well organized, and fact loaded format to get the “worst” gardener on the right track. The text is peppered with little tips and warnings while you learn the how and why of certain lawn practices, as well as easy to follow charts for selecting grasses to meet specific needs. The only drawbacks are the low quality graphics and the lack of pest control methods. However, the top ten lists at the back on drought, trees, games, etc. is worth the price of the book. This is one of the top three books on lawn care.

**The Chemical Free Lawn**  
 Warren Schultz  
 1996, Rodale Press, PA  
 ISBN 0-87857-801-3

One of the most consistent and adept writers on the subject of lawn care, Warren Schultz takes a whack at developing a chemical free approach, and comes up way short. This book does not go into enough detail to help the homeowner truly understand the most effective methods to maintaining a healthy lawn. The weed section is especially odd, suggesting that completely defoliating dandelions, lower than the mower will go, 5-6 times will result in 92%

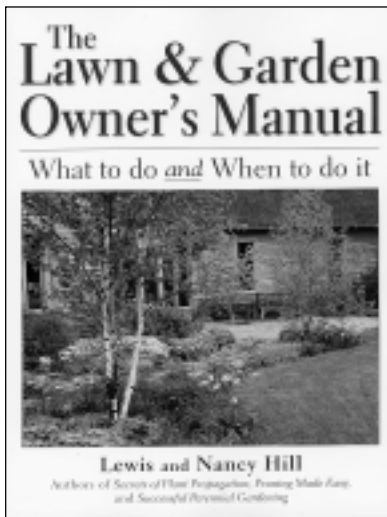


control; and completely omitting the use of corn gluten meal, an important organic option for preemergence weed control. This book exploits many people's interest in this topic and does not deliver the needed information.

**The Lawn and Garden Owners Manual**

Lewis and Nancy Hill  
2000, Storey Communications  
ISBN 1-58017-214-8

The most recent contribution from the Storey line of books is easily their best one yet. While this book does not devote much space to lawn care, for the avid gardener who generally disregards their lawn in favor of more elaborate and colorful aspects, the authors use their space wisely. The text begins with an overall garden calendar filled with timely lawn tips that are very current. The major weakness is the lack of explanation for how and why things are done that might help put things into context, however, as an overall garden resource this is one of the easiest to read and use.



**A Man's Turf: The Perfect Lawn**

Warren Schultz  
1999, Crown Publishing, NY  
ISBN 0-609-60068-0

The first coffee table book of lawn care, Schultz provides an excellent confluence of mechanical, scientific, spiritual, and historical perspectives. Do not expect to read this book and be capable of managing a lawn, however, you will be able to understand the role the lawn has played in the American psyche, as well as the enormity of the current turfgrass industry. The strength of this book is the photographs from Bogart mowing, to the groundskeepers at

the old Yankee Stadium, and all the spectacular close-ups of the grasses. This is the perfect book for anyone obsessed with the lawn, like your local Extension Turfgrass Specialist. While not filled with too much practical information, it is my favorite lawn care book.



**Handbook of Successful Ecological Lawn Care**

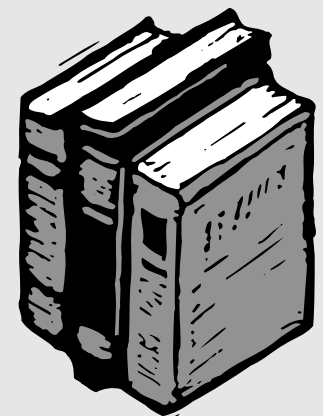
Paul D. Sachs  
1996, Edaphic Press, VT  
ISBN 0-9636053-1-3

Paul Sachs, who also authored *Edaphos: Dynamics of a Natural Soil System*, has compiled an incredible amount of scientific information to support as close to an organic lawn approach as can be found. This book walks the line between textbook and popular writing, as it is filled with scientific references, but then explains them in an easy to understand style. This is the definitive factual guide for establishing a lawn ecosystem. The only weakness is that Paul does not lay it out for you, you have to develop a program for each individual site. I only say this is a weakness because the average homeowner would become frustrated, while the commercial turf manager should be able to develop an implementation plan. The second half of the book is devoted to the business aspects of lawn care that provides an interesting perspective.

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**On the Bookshelf**

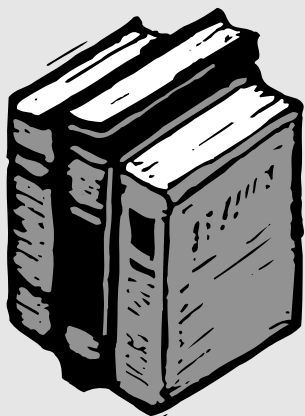
*"A Man's Turf" is the perfect book for anyone obsessed with the lawn, like your local Extension Turfgrass Specialist. While not filled with too much practical information, it is my favorite lawn care book.*





# On the Bookshelf

*“The Wild Lawn Handbook” takes the typical lawn bashing approach to launch what is otherwise one of the best lawn alternative books I have read. Stevie Daniels drew inspiration from leaders in the field such as Neil Diboll to provide an excellent resource for those wanting a wild lawn.*



## Lawn Care Book Reviews

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### Lawn Alternatives

**Redesigning the American Lawn: A Search for Environmental Harmony**

F. Herbert Bormann, Diana Balmori, and Gordon T. Geballe

1993, Yale University Press, CT  
ISBN 0-300-05401-7

This book was a collaborative venture between the faculty and students at Yale University. It was the result of a seminar series between the Art School and the School of Environmental Studies, focused on “The American Lawn”. Simply, the interest of this book is to challenge whether the lawn, as a part of the American landscape, can be justified? The historical review suggests that we have a genetic predisposition to the perfect lawn from our ancestors that has evolved into the “Industrial Lawn” that receives chemical inputs. The book spends the majority of the space citing the environmental costs of lawns, with little practical suggestions besides just letting it go free, hence “The Freedom Lawn” that is only mowed. This is excellent reading to understand the position of environmental advocates against lawns. Unfortunately, it is one-sided.

### The Natural Lawn and Alternatives

Janet Marinelli, Editor

1993, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, NY  
ISBN 0-945352-80-8

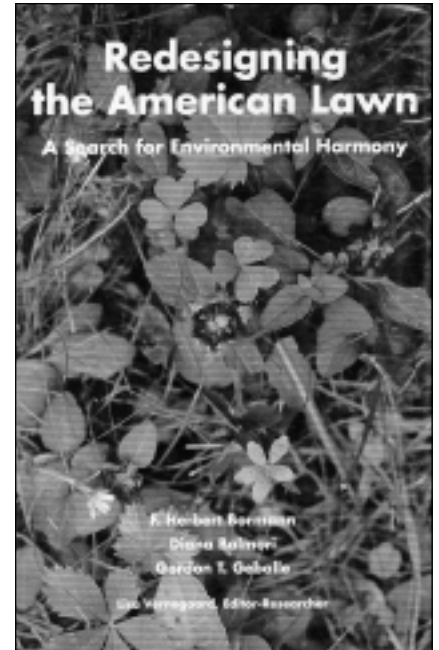
This 90 page booklet provides a nice overview of non-chemical lawn care with few practical suggestions for putting it all together into a plan. The clear strength of this text are the lawn alternative sections, notably the Shade section by David Benner that highlights the use of moss with other shade tolerant plant material, and the Prairie section by Neil Diboll that reviews the basics of establishing a prairie. This is one of many BBG gardening guides that strives to motivate you to do more rather than specifically educate you on how to do it.

### The Blooming Lawn: Creating a Flower Meadow

Yvette Verner

1998, Chelsea Green Publishing, VT  
ISBN 1-890132-18-7

This book was written primarily for designing, installing and caring for a meadow in the United Kingdom, with only scant references to North American concerns. Nevertheless, it is a



well compiled resource for those interested in taking an ecosystems approach to their property. There are wonderful resources for attracting wildlife and the lawn as a habitat. Since this text was born from the author’s personal experience with establishing a meadow, my favorite section was the Meadow Calendar where she articulates the nuances and visitors to her meadow. It is a well written book, but do not expect to be more than motivated.

### The Wild Lawn Handbook

Stevie Daniels

1995, Macmillan, NY  
ISBN 0-02-529445-8

The author takes the typical lawn bashing approach to launch what is otherwise one of the best lawn alternative books I have read. She drew inspiration from leaders in the field such as Neil Diboll to provide an excellent resource for those wanting a wild lawn. The opening chapters on grasses and ground covers is the best chart I have seen that describes species in an easy to follow format. In addition, I found the case study approach effective in describing the challenges one would face when embarking on this type of venture. But clearly, the most entertaining section of the book is the Landscaping Ordinance Chapter. Several pages are devoted to how to establish or change laws that govern mowing requirements, virtually banning wild lawns in an urban setting. Many excellent resources are listed in the appendix.