

The following information is what we at the Orchards Residents Association recommend for the best Spring lawn and garden care.

Lawn Care

To wake up your lawn each Spring, it's recommended to dethatch, aerate, and fertilize your lawn.

Dethatching

- Thatch is a matted layer of dead grass that separates the live grass from the soil below. You want to remove it as it blocks nutrients and water from getting into the soil.
- How to dethatch: a hand rake works well for small areas but a fan rake with metal tines works best.
 - We have electronic dethatchers and a variety of rakes available to borrow from our Community Toolshed! See [here](#). * Available to Orchard residents only.

Aerating

- After removing the thatch, aerating allows the nutrients to get down into the soil. You are breaking up the compaction of soil which naturally occurs over time.
- Aerating creates pathways for nutrients and water to get to the roots. This will let your lawn breathe.
- It's best to aerate your lawn in one or two passes. If you are doing two passes, be sure to go in a pattern.
 - We have a manual aerator available to borrow from our Community Toolshed! See [here](#). * Available to Orchard residents only.

Fertilizing

- The ideal time to fertilize is when the grass is dry, but the ground is moist. The moist ground will let the nutrients seep into the roots. If the grass is wet, the fertilizer will stick to the grass which stops it from getting down to the roots and can even burn your grass.
- Fertilizer is a mix of nutrients that your plants need. Specifically nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.
- The concentration of these nutrients is written on fertilizer bags in numbers, indicating the levels in the order of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium (i.e. 12 - 3 - 10).
 - We have a fertilizer spreader available to borrow from our Community Toolshed! See [here](#). * Available to Orchards residents only

Soil test kits

- These assess what your soil is lacking by identifying the pH level and the levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.
- Once identifying these levels, you can purchase the appropriate fertilizer so you can compensate properly.
- You can purchase test kits at any garden center and online.

Watering

- It is recommended that your lawn gets approximately 1 inch of water per week, in one or two watering sessions - this includes natural rainwater.
- Allowing the soil to dry out between waterings will allow oxygen to flow to the roots.

- It's recommended to water your lawn in the early morning as little water is lost to evaporation.

Mowing

- If you have just aerated your lawn, it is recommended to wait 2-4 weeks before mowing.
- It is best to mow when the grass is dry.
- Avoid mowing in the heat, the heat is an added stressor.
- Do not remove more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the length of the grass at a time. Leaving the grass 2 - 2.5 inch height is recommended.
- It is recommended to mow every 7 - 10 days but ultimately depends on your grass growth.
- When mowing, alternating patterns will help it grow straighter and avoid lawn compaction.
 - We have a manual reel mower available to borrow from our Community Toolshed! See [here](#). * Available to Orchards residents only

Gardening and Tree Care

Rototilling

- Rototill your garden every spring and mix in new topsoil or compost.
- By rototilling your lawn, you are breaking up the dirt compaction for water and nutrients to get down into the soil and roots.
- Rototilling mixes and spreads nutrients to all parts of the garden.

Soil test kits

- These assess what your soil is lacking by identifying your soil's pH and levels of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium.
- Once identifying these levels, you can purchase the appropriate fertilizer so you can compensate properly.
- You can purchase test kits at any garden center and online.

Considerations when choosing what to plant

Space available vs. growing space needed

- When purchasing a seed or bulb, the package should indicate how much space each plant needs to grow.
- Some plants need lots of space for their root system to grow. If there is crowding the roots will compete for nutrients, resources, and space, and you may end up with no plants or plants that don't have adequate space to fully develop.

Harvesting timetable

- Each fruit and vegetable has a different harvesting timetable. For example, pumpkins and other squashes take 90 - 120 days to mature. You want to plant them as early as you can in the season. On the other hand, radishes take 21-35 days.
- Typically, when purchasing seeds or bulbs, the packaging should indicate the growing time and how much sun, shade, and water is needed for it to be successful.

Unsure what vegetables to plant? [Click here](#) to view a helpful resource.

Keep an eye out for pests!

- Some pests can be controlled by insecticide soaps which can be found in any garden center or online.
- Some pests can be controlled by other insects. For example, ladybugs eat aphids, beetle larvae, thrips, and other pests.
- Some pests can be controlled by a physical barrier. For example, a thin net over broccoli will protect it from moths.
- Not all bugs are bad! [Click here](#) to view Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's backyard pest management resource.

It is helpful to cut away any dead or dying parts of a plant to help it grow. If there are dead or dying branches or leaves, the plant will spend most of its nutrients and efforts trying to revive it. By removing it, you are redistributing the nutrients to the rest of the plant.

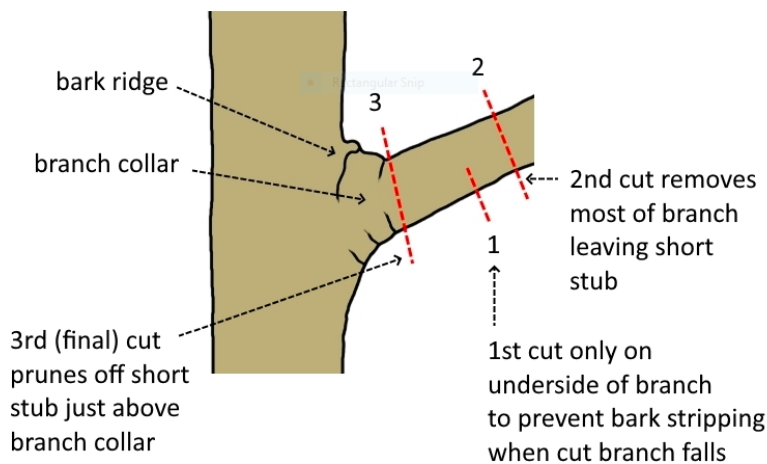
Tree care and pruning tips

Brookfield Residential gifts all new homeowners a fruit tree that coordinates with the overall orchard theme of the community. For more information, [click here!](#)

When and why should you prune a tree?

- To remove dead, diseased, or broken branches. Similar to removing dying leaves from plants, the tree is wasting nutrients and effort trying to revive the dying branches.
- Pruning can also control the size and shape of a tree.
- If there is no reason to prune your tree, it's recommended that you leave it be. Pruning is a stressor to the tree.

When pruning a tree, we recommend using the 3-cut strategy as seen below. This strategy will put the least amount of stress on the tree, and give the smoothest cut.



If your tree is young and has thin branches, the 3-cut strategy may not be needed. The strategy is meant to handle heavier branches to prevent harmful tearing of the bark.

Composting

What is compost?

- It is a soil conditioner and fertilizer made up of decayed organic matter.

Pros:

- Improves the health and structure of your soil by adding organic matter.
- Helps soil retain moisture and nutrients.
- Attracts beneficial organisms to the soil and reduces the need for pesticides and fertilizers.

Cons:

- Time and effort
 - You will not get your first composting harvest for a couple of months. It also requires regular upkeep by adding and mixing the “green” material.
- Space and smell
 - While you can build different sizes of compost depending on your needs, if you have a small yard with compost in a corner, you may smell the compost.
- Aesthetic
 - Some people find the big black barrels to be unsightly.

Building a compost:

Pick a spot for your compost to be in a level, well-drained, accessible area, and ensure you can get to the compost all year round.

Setting up your compost

- 1) Fill with 2/3rd “brown” materials such as autumn leaves, shredded paper, paper towels, or lawn rakings.
- 2) Add “green” materials such as kitchen scraps such as fruits, veggies, coffee/tea, leftovers, juice, and hair in a layer. Cover each layer with about 5 cm of ordinary soil. This contains microorganisms that will accelerate the composting process. A layer of soil will also help mask any odors.
- 3) Pour water into the compost until it is as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

Weekly Upkeep

- Frequently add your “green” scraps to the compost pile and aerate it (“fluff” it up). Be sure the greens are thoroughly mixed with the “brown” materials.
- Make sure the bin is moist, it will not work if the compost is too dry. It’s recommended when rinsing out your scrap pail, dump that water into the compost bin.
- The bin will get warm and produce some heat (it should be muggy and gross in the bin)
 - A hot pile can reach temperatures of 65 degrees Celsius.
 - Good results can still be reached at temperatures as low as 50 degrees Celsius.
- It will take a couple of months to be able to harvest compost from the bottom of the bin.
- Finished compost is dark brown in color, crumbly, lightweight, and has an earthy odor

Composting meat

- While technically you can compost meat and bones, it is not recommended for a backyard set-up as it will attract unwanted pests (raccoons, dogs, coyotes, etc.).
- It can also create dangerous pathogens, especially if the compost pile isn't hot enough!
- There is potential for serious illness or worse if the resulting compost contaminates the food you are growing.

Unsure what items you can compost? View the City of Edmonton's Food Scraps information by [clicking here](#).

Worms

- Worms benefit your pile as they tunnel through it. The tunneling helps aerate your compost, which makes it easier and faster for beneficial bacteria to grow and break down the scraps.
- **Red Wigglers** thrive on eating rotting vegetative material.
 - Generally you have to purchase this worm, they're not native to many gardens. Fortunately, they are inexpensive.
 - **Earthworms** live in most lawns, gardens, etc. While they can benefit your compost by tunneling, they prefer to consume soil rather than rotting matter.
- The best composters to be used with worms are ones with an open bottom. This will allow the worms to escape into the soil if the conditions become too hot or too cold.
- If you buy a compost tumbler, do not put worms in it! The tumbler's action and heat inside it will kill the worms. If they survive, the environment is not suitable for them to breed or break down any matter.

Want the benefits of composting without having to maintain one?

City of Edmonton compost is available at Ambleside (14710 Ellerslie Road SW) or Kennedale (5355 127 Ave) Eco Station.

- Pickup is free but limited to 100L
- You must bring your own shovel and container(s).

View the Free City of Edmonton Compost information by [clicking here](#).