

# Organic Land Care *with*



**"A nation that destroys its soils  
destroys itself. Forests are the lungs  
of our land, purifying the air and giving  
fresh strength to our people."**

**Franklin Delano Roosevelt** (1882-1945)  
32nd President of the United States

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**Our Mission:**

"To support our  
communities in their  
transition to  
organic practices".

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www.organiclandcare.org

**March, 2006**

Organic Lawn Care: Tips for Spring!

While winter cannot make up its mind whether it is staying or leaving, here are some timely tips on organic lawn care:

Spring is the time when grass plants put their energy into roots first. Top growth follows later! As the soil starts to warm up, microbial life becomes active as well. Therefore this is the time to topdress with organic matter, providing food for the microbes. If necessary, you may choose to aerate before topdressing. This is also the right time to apply microbial inoculants and mycorrhizal fungi.

On the other hand, short mowing must be avoided now, as this practice forces the plant's energy resource into top growth while it is really needed at the roots. For the same reason, now is *not* the time to apply synthetic nitrogen fertilizer - in fact, organic turf management avoids any chemical fertilizer altogether, and instead makes use of organic matter to improve the soil's natural fertility.

Knowing about the cyclical nature of turf growth, and supporting the natural processes of the grasslands ecosystem, will result in lush and healthy lawns. Put some SOUL in your garden, and get your lawn off drugs!

— CN

# Latest Research on Sudden Oak Death (Phytophthora)

Compiled from several on-line sources on the SOUL web site, and Gaia College Program Updates ([www.gaiacollege.ca](http://www.gaiacollege.ca)) - with thanks to Heide Hermary.

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Several plant genera and species have recently been added to the list of plants affected by Sudden Oak Death. The list now includes *Ardisia*, *Euonymus*, *Gaultheria*, *Osmanthus*, and *Prunus*. The fungus affects ornamental landscape plants and native plants alike: camellias, rhododendron, or lilacs are as vulnerable as our west coast's firs, maples, and arbutus trees.

The pathogen travels in infected plants, soils, and even in dead firewood from the trees it killed. By far the most common route is through imported plant material - and nurseries are busy stocking up for the upcoming spring season.

Under these circumstances, buying local takes on a whole new meaning: The safest plants are those not only bought, but actually grown, at the local nursery!

As with any so-called pest or disease, the organic approach in horticulture is to not only look at treating or curing a symptom, but to research the underlying causes, and to find methods of prevention.

Ask yourself: For how long have these plants and their pathogens been around, keeping each other in balance? How come we are facing a new, "sudden" epidemic that affects ecosystems and nursery trades in North America and far beyond? Is this a single-pathogen issue or a general plant health issue? What if this, too, comes down to natural soil fertility, healthy ecosystems both above ground and below, and resulting plant immunity?

There is truly exciting research going on in Australia and California. Links to two particularly useful articles and much more information can be found through the SOUL web site, "Education" page. Here is a short excerpt from the California article to make you curious:

*"The pathogen, if it existed at all, Zingaro insisted, was merely a secondary cause, a microbe feeding on a malnourished, environmentally stressed tree. "It's caused by soil acidification," Zingaro said to anyone who found his or her way onto his three-acre Petaluma ranch. (An outbuilding houses the office, experimental "dirt" and products.) "I get to the truth because I'm willing to pick up a shovel and dig."*

*Applying his own theory to Sudden Oak Death, Zingaro fed his customers' trees – those affected and also ones deemed "high-risk" – with a phosphite-based fertilizer, Bio-Serum, which he touted as a "tree tonic." He also says he applied a combination of other minerals and rock dust, designed to address the problems with the soil."*

(from: "SCREAMING TREES" by Annette Stark, Los Angeles CityBeat, March 4, 2004)

Ironically, in this case the promoter of the practice and fertilizers is being charged with violating pesticide legislation. But that's another story...! --CN



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[www.organiclandcare.org](http://www.organiclandcare.org)