

How “Green” is Your Lawn?

Sure, the lawns that surround your homes and neighborhoods are lush and green in color this time of year. However, lawns aren’t nearly as “green” or environmentally beneficial as you may think. Lawn maintenance can contribute to water pollution, but there are actions you can take to reduce your lawn’s impact on water quality and enrich the environment.



Lawn care can be careless

The unfortunate truth is that a perfectly manicured, green lawn is typically achieved at a high environmental cost. The following are ways in which lawn care can be a burden on your environment:

- **Wastes water** – keeping your turf from turning brown during summer dry spells can waste water. *Did you know that lawn irrigation, on average, consumes 200 gallons of water per person, per day?*
- **Toxic Chemicals** –pesticides and herbicides may rid your yard of unwanted pests and weeds, but when rain washes them into streams through stormwater runoff, they can kill aquatic life and contaminate the water we drink.
- **Excess Nutrients** – fertilizers used to aid in lawn growth are a major source of excess nutrients that pollute our waterways. Lawn fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, which contribute to algal blooms. Algal blooms prevent sunlight from reaching aquatic plants. The lack of sunlight causes plant death and decomposition, which further consumes oxygen. The lack of oxygen leads to death of other aquatic life, and on it goes!
- **Grass Clippings** – grass clippings, when swept or washed into storm drains, are another source of excess nutrients in waterways. *Did you know that one bushel of fresh grass clippings, when broken down, can contain 0.1 pounds of phosphorus? That amount of phosphorus is enough to produce 30-50 pounds of algae!*
- **Lawn Mowing** – not only is mowing the lawn bad on your back, but it’s also bad for the environment. Lawn mowers burn fossil fuels and release greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere. *Did you know that a gas-powered push mower used for one hour produces as much air pollution as ten cars driven the same amount of time?*



“Lettuce” count the lawn alternatives

To help lessen the burden of lawn care on the environment (and your water bill), consider reducing the size of your lawn. Smaller lawns need less water, less maintenance by mowing, and less toxic chemicals from fertilizing.

Determine how much of your lawn you use for recreation, (e.g., play areas or walkways)

and plant alternatives in the remaining space. Alternatives can include small islands of native trees and shrubs, expansions of flower beds or wooded area, creating rain gardens or wetland areas in places where rain water collects, or no-mow meadows. Areas rich with native plants provide habitat and food sources to various wildlife, insects, and birds.

Another alternative to the traditional lawn is to use the space to plant fruit and vegetable gardens. These spaces convert unoccupied lawn area into a productive space that feeds families with healthy, local food while reconnecting them to their environment and neighbors.



However, if you desire great expanses of grass, here are seven steps to ensure that you have a healthy lawn that keeps rivers and streams healthy too!

1. **Test your soil** – find out what your lawn actually needs to thrive.
2. **Fertilize only when necessary** – use organic compost instead of chemical fertilizers.
3. **Mow high** – don’t cut your grass too short, taller grasses help prevent weeds (2 ½ to 3 inches); keep grass clippings on your lawn to recycle nutrients and increase organic matter.
4. **Pick the right seed** – select the best grass seed for your lawn.
5. **Water thoughtfully** – don’t overwater your lawn and water in the cooler part of the day so it doesn’t evaporate before it has a chance to soak into the soil.
6. **Deal with lawn invaders safely** – remove weeds by hand, with a trowel, or boiling water.
7. **Minimize pollution** – use your gas-powered mower sparingly to reduce air pollution or use an electric or reel mower.

Visit the websites below for more information:

<http://www.cbf.org/join-us/more-things-you-can-do/with-your-family/in-your-yard/lawn-care>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-hostetler/are-lawns-bad_b_1362571.html

[The Organic Lawn Care Manual: A Natural, Low-maintenance System for a Beautiful, Safe Lawn by Paul Tukey](#)