# Lawn Reduction

Traditional American landscaping focuses on maintaining a manicured green lawn. However, native trees, shrubs, ground cover, prairie or meadow patches, flower beds, and attractively mulched areas are better environmental choices, for people and wildlife.

A gas-powered push mower emits as much hourly pollution as 11 cars and a riding mower as much as 34 cars.

## Did You Know

- Approximately 40 million U.S. acres are planted as lawn, including residential and commercial properties and golf courses. More land in the U.S. is devoted to lawns than irrigated crops like corn or wheat.
- 30-60% of urban fresh water is used for watering lawns, depending on the city.
- 67 million pounds of synthetic pesticides are used on U.S. lawns annually.
- Yard waste, mostly grass clippings, makes up 20% of municipal solid waste collected, and much of it ends up in landfills.
- Lawns have less than 10% of the water absorbing capacity of natural woodlands, which contributes to suburban flooding.

## Reasons to Reduce Your Lawn and Plant Native Plants

- Save time and money that you would normally spend on mowing and fertilizing grass. Native plants require much less maintenance than turf grass.
- Areas of lawn that include only one type of plant, such as turf grass, offer little habitat value for wildlife. A variety of native plants can provide wildlife with food, cover and places to raise their young.
- Conserve water. Native plants, once established, require much less water than turf grass.
- Reduce lawn mower air pollution.
- Decrease run-off of lawn fertilizers and pesticides into local watersheds. Once established, native plants do not require fertilizers or pesticides.

**Unlike many native plants, turf grasses do not provide a good source of food or habitat for most types of wildlife.**

## Alternatives to Turf Grass that Benefit Wildlife

- Many native plant species can be used as ground cover in place of turf grass.
- Install native plants, trees and shrubs, which have great habitat value for wildlife. Encourage the native plants you already have and replace exotic invasive species with native ones. You can even create a butterfly or

hummingbird garden with native plants. The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center has lists of recommended native plants by region and state at **www.wildflower.org/collections**.

- Create a water garden or pond to provide a water source for wildlife.
- Create a rock garden or use garden borders of rock or wood. Wildlife will be able to use the rocks for shelter.
- Use mulched paths. Mulch can reduce weeds and prevent erosion. Use organic mulch to improve the soil with nutrients and increase its water holding capacity.
- Plant an organic vegetable garden.

## How to Reduce Your Lawn

Make a plan of how you want your yard to look. Check with your local municipality, neighborhood, or homeowners' association for regulations. Once you have decided on a small area of your yard to convert, follow these simple steps:

1. Cover turf grass with 6-10 layers of newspaper (black & white only) or brown cardboard. There is no need to remove the grass first.
2. Make sure the sections overlap one another so that grass and weeds will not come up between the cracks.
3. Wet down the newspaper or cardboard.
4. Cover the newspaper or cardboard with a thick layer of mulch or dirt (4-6 inches).
5. Allow turf grass and weeds to die back for 4-6 weeks.
6. Plant directly through the mulch and newspaper/cardboard. If you know you're going to be planting trees or shrubs, dig the holes before putting down the layers of newspaper/cardboard and then layer the newspaper/cardboard around the holes.

## Enjoy Your New Yard!

Adventure awaits just outside your door! Take a "Green 15" (at least 15 minutes outside) every day to enjoy your new yard.

- Watch for birds and other wildlife in your yard and neighborhood – go to Wildlife Watch at **www.nwf.org/wildlifewatch/** to learn all about a national nature watching program for people of all ages.
- Visit **www.nwf.org/beoutthere** to find lots of fun outdoor activity ideas.

## Resources

- The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center has lists of recommended native plants by region and state at **www.wildflower.org/collections.**
- EPA's GreenScapes program provides ideas for cost-saving and environmentally-friendly landscaping at **www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/rrr/greenscapes/owners.htm**.
- Learn about beneficial landscaping at EPA's Green Communities website at **www.epa.gov/greenkit/landscap.htm**.

Visit **www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife** for more information.

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