



Lawn Reduction... Cut Your Lawn in Half!

For over a century now, traditional American landscaping has focused on maintaining a perfectly manicured green lawn. Native trees, shrub masses, ground covers, prairie or meadow patches, flower beds, and attractively mulched areas are better environmental choices, for people and for wildlife.

Did you know that...

- approximately 20 million U.S. acres are planted as residential lawn;
- a lawnmower pollutes as much in one hour as a car does driving for 350 miles;
- 30-60% of the potable municipal water in the U.S. is used for maintaining lawns;
- 67 million pounds of synthetic pesticides are used on U.S. lawns annually; and
- these lawn monocultures offer little habitat value for wildlife?

Five good reasons to reduce your lawn:

1. Save time and money that you would normally spend on mowing and fertilizing (especially if you use a lawn service).
2. Increase your home's energy conservation.
3. Attract and provide for wildlife visitors.
4. Conserve water.
5. Reduce mower pollution and decrease run-off of fertilizers and pesticides.

If you are fed up with lawn maintenance, here are some alternatives to consider:

- Native species as ground cover instead of grass
- Native trees and/or shrub masses
- Water garden or pond
- Rock garden
- Mulched path
- Annual or perennial bed



- Meadow or prairie patch
- Hedgerow
- Organic vegetable garden
- Butterfly or hummingbird garden

Before taking action...

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

1. Cover turf grass with 6-10 layers of newspaper (black & white only) or brown cardboard. Make sure the sections overlap one another so that grass and weeds will not come up between the cracks. Wet down the newspaper or cardboard.
2. Cover the newspaper or cardboard with a thick layer of mulch or dirt (4-6 inches).
3. Allow turf grassed weeds to die back 4-6 weeks.
4. Plant directly through the mulch and newspaper/cardboard. Waiting a few weeks during a rainy period can help soften the material, making it easier to plant through. 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.

Other things to consider:

- Determine what is thriving on your site now. Encourage native plants already present and replace exotic invasive species with native species.
- Mulch can reduce weeds and prevent erosion. Organic mulches improve the soil with nutrients and increase water holding capacity.
- Borders of rock or wood can bring a sense of order to a “wild garden” in an urban or suburban neighborhood. This may make your naturalistic landscape more acceptable to neighbors.
- Don’t forget to make a place for people as well. A bench or path will accommodate this nicely and add to your enjoyment.

Suggested Reading

Daniels, Stevie. *The Wild Lawn Handbook*. 223p. 1995. Macmillan Publishing Co.

Rappaport, Bret. “To Mow or Grow,” published in *Wildflower*, Spring 1996 issue.

Schultz, Warren. *The Chemical-Free Lawn*. 208p. 1989. Rodale Press.

Taylor, Patricia. *Easy Care Native Plants*. 325p. 1996. Henry Holt and Co.

Wilson, William H. *Landscaping with Wildflowers and Native Plants*. 96p. 1985. Ortho Information Services.

In the mean time...

- Set a goal of reducing your lawn size.
- Use a mulching mower to avoid collecting and disposing of clippings.
- If you must water your lawn, do so early in the morning, deeper and less often.
- Allow different species to grow with your lawn. Enjoy the diversity.
- Allow your lawn to go dormant in the heat of the summer.
- Use a grass variety that requires little pesticides, water, and fertilizer in your area.
- Contact your county extension service about environmentally responsible lawn practices for your region.



- Use a short native grass or a grass that matures at a lower height to reduce the need for mowing. Buffalo grass is one example that grows well in the southwest and plain states.
- If the size of your lawn permits, use the modern version of the “old fashioned” style push mower to help reduce pollution.

Helpful Organizations

National Wildlife Federation® (www.nwf.org):

NWF’s Backyard Wildlife Habitat program educates and inspires people to enhance and maintain their landscapes with the needs of wildlife in mind. People who restore habitat to their yards and improve their local environment by reducing the use of fertilizers, pesticides, and water, are recognized through a certification process.

Smaller American Lawns Today (arboretum.conncoll.edu/salt/salt/):

S.A.L.T. is a campaign originating at Connecticut College that aims to reverse the modern obsession with the lawn by restoring home and industrial grounds to more harmonious productive ecologically sound naturalistic landscapes.

Wild Ones — Natural Landscapers, Ltd. (www.for-wild.org):

Wild Ones is a grassroots organization that educates and shares information about landscaping using native species in developing plant communities.