

*Healthy Lawns
And
Landscapes
Using
Non-Toxic Lawn Care*



Now is the time to make the move to non-toxic lawn care ... For yourself, your children, your pets and the environment.



Distributed by the Watching Environmental Commission

Pesticides are grub controls, weed killers, fungus treatments, insect sprays, crab grass preventers, insecticides and herbicides.

Pesticides are poisons. Pesticide exposure in humans has been associated with brain defects, numerous cancers, Parkinson's disease and other neurological disorders, male and female infertility and immune system problems.

Pesticides contaminate drinking water. Use of pesticides in urban and suburban communities contributes significantly to contamination of our water supplies, wells, rivers, streams and lakes.

Children are more vulnerable to toxic effects of pesticides. The use of household and lawn pesticides puts children at risk for birth defects, cancers and behavioral problems.

Children are more at risk because of their size and behaviors. A recent study of preschoolers, 99% of them had one or more pesticides in their bodies.

An EPA registration number does not mean that a product is safe. The long-term health effects of most pesticide ingredients, their breakdown products and their interactions are not well known.

Lawn pesticides get carried indoors by shoes, paws and air currents. Once inside, pesticides linger in carpets, dust, toys and air. Away from sunlight and water, pesticides can persist for many months.

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Imagine your children playing on grass that is pesticide free wherever they go.

Imagine watering costs cut in half. Healthy soils with thriving microorganisms lead to deep-rooted grass. Deep roots require less watering, less fertilizing and save you money.

Imagine no mowing! Turn part of your lawn into a landscape with a diversity of hardy native plants, flowers, ground covers, trees and shrubs. Native deer-resistant bushes include Holly, Magnolia, Spice bush, Sumac and witch hazel.

Simple Steps of Organic Lawn Care

The easiest, most cost effective way to a beautiful, healthy lawn is to work with nature, not against it. A healthy lawn needs nutrients and microbe-rich soil to develop deep-rooted, dense turf that competes successfully with weeds. Dense turf is beautiful and low maintenance. It naturally resists drought, insects and diseases.

Pesticides are not necessary for a beautiful lawn. In fact, they can do more harm than good. They kill microbial life necessary for healthy soil and can kill the pest's natural enemies. This invites disease and insect infestation, which leads to more pesticide use and traps you in an unhealthy, costly chemical cycle.



Think! - Make America a safer place to live starting in your own back yard.

Yearly Lawn Maintenance Schedule

March and April

Sharpen mower blades.
Raise mower blade to 2.5 or 3 inches
Test soil: Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Somerset County (908) 526-6293
Add soil amendments based on soil test.
Re-seed bare patches or apply corn gluten to prevent weed germination.
If feasible, leave clippings on lawn to fertilize.

May and June

Check for weeds; pull out by hand.
Re-seed bare spots.
Monitor for insect pests.
If you have grub damage, spot treat with milky spore (once every ten years) and/or with beneficial nematode worms (once yearly for 2 or 3 years).

August

You may allow lawn to go dormant during drought. It will green up after rain.

September and October

Best time to seed (generously).
Fertilize if needed (sparingly) or top dress with ¼ inch compost.
Aerate if soil is compacted
Lime if an autumn soil test finds pH lower than 6.8.

November

Final mowing at 2 inches for easier leaf raking.

Managing Your Lawn Service

- ◆ Specify mowing high with sharp blades.
- ◆ Request corn gluten and organic fertilizer instead of “Weed and Feed” products.
- ◆ Refuse routine application of pesticides, but if pesticides are used, make sure they are handled properly and applied sparingly by a licensed professional.
- ◆ Beware if a lawn service tells you a chemical application is safe. Federal EPA regulations prohibit manufacturers from making pesticide safety claims, even if used as directed. All pesticides must be treated with caution.
- ◆ Never allow unidentified products to be used on your lawn. Request safety information and read it before application. Look up toxicity at www.pesticide.org.
- ◆ Be aware that chemicals listed as inert ingredients can be highly toxic.
- ◆ Many pesticides persist in lawns and soil long after the posted 24-72 hours.
- ◆ Ask for an organic program. An organic lawn can take up to 3 years to fully establish.
- ◆ Organic lawn care has been defined by the Northeast Organic Farming Association in their Standards for Organic Land Care. Order a copy from www.organiclandcare.net/publications.
- ◆ Share this flyer with your lawn care professional. A letter is also available on the Watchung Borough website outlining the benefits of non-toxic lawn care.

10 Steps to Non-Toxic Lawn Care

1. **Mow High** - Set your mower’s cutting height to 2.5 or 3 inches to discourage invasion by weeds and insects. This encourages growth of deeper, healthier roots that help lock in moisture.
2. **Leave grass clippings on lawn** - Grass clippings become your lawn’s fertilizer, reducing the need to add additional fertilizer by 30%.
3. **Water “deeply”** - Your lawn needs about 1” of water, applied  once a week. Watering more frequently encourages shallow, weak roots. To minimize evaporation, water before 8 am or in the evening.
4. **Use ecological methods of pest control** - Spray a mixture of dish soap and water during warm weather. This is an effective way to discourage insects from eating your greenery.
5. **Alternatives** - Reduce the area of grass that needs maintenance by planting perennial flower beds, expanding your herb or vegetable garden, or naturalizing your lawn with local wildflowers and plants.
6. **Rake** - Rake to gently remove thatch - the layer of dead grass compacted over winter-can increase water absorption.
7. **Fertilize** - Fertilize twice a year.
8. **Aerate** - Aerate your lawn by removing small plugs of earth to decrease soil compaction, increase water retention capacities and improve air circulation to the roots.
9. **Top-dress with compost** - Use your own vegetable/fruit compost or if you don’t have your own vegetable compost heap, buy composted cow or sheep manure or mushroom compost.
10. **Overseed** - When combined with aeration and top-dressing, overseeding will fill in bare patches to prevent weed invasion.

Go to www.watchungnj.com for a listing of non-toxic products available locally.