

MAY 2020

Spruce Up Your Yard



A healthy grass lawn provides many benefits to the environment as a ground cover, such as erosion prevention and weed control. However, we must also be careful not to outweigh these benefits through actions like overapplying fertilizer or needlessly using pesticides. There are many ways we can grow a healthy lawn outside of these options that are also good for the environment. This way, we can spruce up the looks and health of our yards while also remaining sustainable!

One major consideration for a healthy grass lawn is planting a type a grass that suites your yard's conditions. This means planting [cool season grasses](#) like Kentucky bluegrass or perennial ryegrass in cooler climates and [warm season grasses](#) like Bermuda grass or zoysia grass in warmer climates. Many of us live in the D.C. metro area, which is a [transition zone](#) between the two grass types. Grasses like tall fescue tend to grow well in this

area, though light conditions can also help make an informed choice when choosing a grass seed. Matching the shade tolerance of your grass to your yard can allow you to grow grass in even the most shaded areas, like under thick trees! Another consideration for a healthy grass lawn is your maintenance plan. Most grasses should be cut to a height of around 3" to allow for strong root growth to outcompete weeds.¹ You could also consider removing thatch buildup from your yard to allow water and nutrients to better penetrate the soil. Utilizing tips like these will help you maintain a healthy lawn without resorting to unnecessary fertilizer and extra watering, which wastes resources and can damage stormwater runoff.

Another aspect to a healthy yard is biodiversity, which provides habitats for native species and can improve several environmental aspects of your yard. One of the easiest ways to introduce more biodiversity to your yard is to plant a few trees or shrubs. Once grown, these plants will provide habitats for species like birds and squirrels, while also removing carbon dioxide from the air. Trees are particularly noteworthy in this ability, removing approximately 48 pounds per year.² Trees and shrubs also provide shade, which is especially beneficial in the urban environment. Large cities tend to be warmer than surrounding rural areas, known as the urban heat island effect. Planting trees and shrubs is a simple method many cities are using to combat this effect.

Adding a flower bed or garden to your yard provides a great aesthetic, while also sheltering and/or feeding native species. You could even design your flower bed specifically to suit pollinators, [as we've previously discussed](#). If you opt for a garden, you can enjoy your hard work by savoring your own fresh produce. This helps reduce your carbon footprint and waste generation by eliminating the shipping and packaging aspects of store-bought produce. In addition, converting grass into one of these areas will cut down your mowing time!

Lastly, if you are lucky enough to have a very large yard, you could consider adopting a no-mow policy for certain areas or convert part of your yard into a meadow. These areas provide a more natural habitat for native species compared to a grass lawn and require the smallest amount of maintenance. A meadow can require a few years of work to properly establish, but will eventually flourish if you [follow local guidance](#). Please consider using some of the strategies outlined above to keep your yard healthy and sustainable!

TAKE ACTION



Clean Up Your Lawn Equipment!

Lawn equipment can be very helpful during landscaping and gardening. However, the gasoline-powered versions of these tools can also be hazardous to the environment and human health. Learn more about your alternatives inside!

[LEARN MORE](#)

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Announcing the 2019 NIH Green Labs!

The NIH Green Labs Program followed up a successful inaugural year with an even more successful second campaign. Join me in congratulating the 2019 NIH Green Labs, now with Bronze, Silver and Gold certifications!

[LEARN MORE](#)

NEMS TRAINING

Did you know? Based on 10-year averages, the concentration of ground-level ozone has decreased in recent years, likely as a result of increased air quality regulations.³ However, local concentrations of ozone can still exceed harmful levels in very specific areas during the summer months. One source that could produce these elevated local concentrations is gasoline lawn and gardening equipment.⁴ To learn more about air emissions at the NIH, please visit the [NEMS Training webpage](#) to view a short (20 minute) NIH environmental awareness training video.