

Green Tips

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Mowing Down Pollution in Your Yard: Tips for Conserving Energy and Water

The National Wildlife Federation states that one gasoline lawn mower, used once a week during the growing season, causes as much air pollution as 43 late-model cars driven 12,000 miles in a year. Weed whackers, leaf blowers, and other equipment add more.

Here are some suggestions to reduce pollution:

- Consider reducing the amount of lawn around your home. Substitute garden space, ideally with native plants, drought-tolerant species, or foods for your table. Lawns are not well-suited for our climate. When water is abundant, moss and weeds flourish unless harmful chemicals are used to maintain the “monoculture” of grass. When water is scarce, it loses its green luster unless vast quantities of scarce water are used to irrigate it.
- Furthermore, unless you have a golf course or baseball field, the costs of lawn probably outweigh the benefits. A large lawn is wasteful of resources and causes environmental damage. Grass has 95% of the runoff coefficient of pavement, so rain is lost instead of soaking into the ground where it is needed to replenish our aquifers that supply all of our fresh water.
- Substituting a garden instead of a lawn, especially when absorbent soils and mulches are used, enables rainwater to be captured for plants and aquifers far more effectively than a lawn.

To the extent that you keep lawn that requires mowing, consider the following energy-saving tips:

- Set your mower to maximum height, and mow less often. You will find that your grass is much greener and may not require any water, at all.
- Learn to sharpen the mower blades. A simple file will do the job, and the mower will cut much faster, and use less energy when cutting.
- Use electric mowers, weed whackers, and leaf blowers. Electric equipment gets the job done with much less energy. A one horsepower electric lawn mower will easily compete with a five horsepower gas mower. Electric power plants are much less polluting than any gasoline powered equipment for the same amount of energy. Besides, you will not have to deal with filling a mower with gasoline (a known carcinogen) or change oil (which also has known carcinogens, and presents a disposal problem).
- Use a rake and a broom instead of a leaf blower. They are quiet, efficient, and good exercise. They usually do a better job as well.