

How Green is Your Garden?

Midsummer. The last rainfall was days – or was it weeks? – ago, and your lawn and garden are reaching the relative color and lushness of Melba toast.

This is the time when having a sustainable solution up your sleeve can make all the difference for the health of your lawn, garden, family, and planet. How do your landscaping decisions affect the ecosystem? Here are some issues reported by the National Wildlife Federation, along with simple answers.

Thirty percent of water used on the East Coast goes to watering lawns.

- To reduce your water bill, start with drought-friendly grass that needs minimal moisture. Call the Baltimore County Extension Office at 1-800-342-2507 for cultivar suggestions.
- Water deeply, but not too often. A moisture sensor can tell you when your lawn is truly dry, thereby saving 90% or more on irrigation costs.
- To avoid overwatering, put a rain gauge in the sprinkler zone and turn it off when the water level reaches one inch. Later, you can add a timer to your system for auto-shutoff, extending your savings.

The average suburban lawn received 10 times as much chemical pesticide per acre as farmland - over 70 million tons of fertilizers and pesticides are applied to residential lawns and gardens annually.

It's time to look at some alternatives to popular pesticides, which have a devastating environmental – and human! - impact. For example:

- **Sevin** (a.k.a. carbaryl) causes fatal nerve damage in honeybees, and may endanger up to 80 species of wildlife; even humans can be poisoned by Sevin exposure.
- **Bifenthrin** (found in many lawn products) travels by runoff to waterways, where it causes fatal nerve damage to the tiny crustaceans that feed the fish that we and other predators eat.
- **Round-up** kills earthworms, beneficial insects, birds and mammals, in addition to causing cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, pulmonary, and nervous system damage, and cancer, in humans.

The solution? Protect your family and the Chesapeake Bay: ask the Cooperative Extension Service (or Catonsville's own All-Star Pest Management!) about the new discoveries in effective, chemical-free Integrated Pest Management.

A gas lawn mower emits 10-12 times as much hydrocarbon per hour as a typical auto. A weed eater emits 21 times more, and a leaf blower 34 times more.

With the growing green awareness, clean alternatives are multiplying! Of course, electric yard tools eliminate the emissions factor and are far lighter and more manageable. But also check out the new zero-emissions, zero-waste propane-powered garden tools that are winning a nod from the EPA. Old-fashioned reel mowers are a great aerobic alternative for the small yard, and for mowing a larger area with minimal emissions, look at the biodiesel-powered lawnmower line just released by Toro.

For a range of green products for your home and garden, contact Phila Hoopes at phila@freshgreenimage.com, or visit her at <http://www.greenirene.com/1206>.