

DON'T LET THE GRASS GROW UNDER YOUR FEET:

How we can prevent lawn care from harming our water

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INTRODUCTION

Everybody loves the look of a lush green lawn - but it comes at a price. Suburban lawns and parks are an underestimated source of water pollution. Over application and improper use of fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides can lead to harmful run-off into lakes, rivers and oceans. Action can be taken to reduce this source of pollution



Americans use

75

million lbs of pesticides per year³ on their gardens



THE PROBLEM

Lawn chemical runoff can:

- Harm and poison fish and other ocean wildlife ¹
- Contaminate sources of drinking water
- Encourage algal blooms, creating dead zones where aquatic life is minimal ⁵
- Contaminate species in coastal fisheries



Why? Fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium which in large quantities are toxic to waterways. ⁵

Pesticides, which are designed to kill insects, are also harmful to aquatic insects and fish life. All contamination eventually makes its way into the ocean

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- Avoid running sprinklers after chemical application
- Do not apply fertilizers before forecasted rainfalls
- Use organic compost
- Read the labels to prevent overapplication

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Create bylaws to reduce cosmetic lawn chemical use

- Enforce the use and sale of only organic fertilizers
- Designate fertilizer-free zones 10 feet from waterways
- Move towards a full ban of cosmetic pesticides/herbicides (or in rainy months) ²

2 Monitor marine contaminants

- Make it a priority to test local fish and shellfish for synthetic chemical levels quarterly

3 Make free pesticide disposal sites

- Unused pesticides can often be dumped onto lawns/ poured down the sink or storm drains
- In collaboration with local recycling centers

4 Educate communities on proper lawn care practices

Compliance is achieved through buy-in rather than strict rules

- Send a pamphlet to homeowners
- Incorporate a lesson in school curriculums
- Create a city affiliated webpage with information available on composting (a great organic, slow releasing fertilizer)

SUCCESS STORIES

When Ann Arbor, Michigan banned phosphorous fertilizers for grass starting in 2009, it led to a 28% drop in pollutant levels in nearby Huron River. ¹

PROBLEMS WITH IMPLEMENTATION

Banning lawn chemicals does not guarantee a cease of use - and green lush lawns are important to Americans. The good news is, green lawns do not always require harsh chemicals and the environmental benefits are plentiful - How do we get people passionate about this topic?

CITATIONS

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