

— SUMMER —

THE ECO-WISE WAY

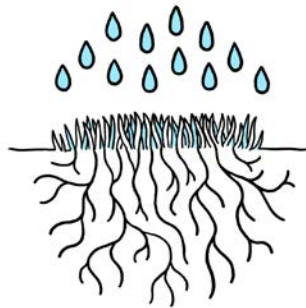
The smell of grass, the trill of chirping birds, the coolness of a tree's shade, the scrunch of earth underfoot... your outdoor space is a natural wonder. How you care for it matters to it—and the world outside your fence. Learn how to help your yard thrive and go truly, vibrantly green.

PHOTOGRAPH BY NGOC MINH NGO

Everything outside is connected—from the treetops to the soil, and all the plants in between. Treat your yard like an ecosystem, and it will flourish. This home's meadow was designed by Refugia, a Philadelphia-based firm that specializes in creating eco-conscious landscapes with native plants.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

KEEP IT QUENCHED...



Water your yard infrequently but deeply when needed—for at least 30 minutes versus a little bit daily. This way, moisture soaks into the roots and encourages them to grow downward rather than staying near the surface, where they're more susceptible to heat and drought. Do it in the early morning, before the heat of the day hits and evaporation rates rise.

TEST THE GROUND WHEN IN DOUBT, TAKE A WALK ON YOUR LAWN. IF YOU CAN SEE YOUR STEPS, IT'S TIME TO WATER.

...BUT CONSERVE WATER, TOO

LOW-TECH TRICKS A lawn needs about an inch of water a week. Use a moisture meter with a 12-inch probe to know when it's necessary. When watering, send moisture straight to the roots with a soaker hose or low-angle sprinkler instead of an oscillating one. And collect water for use with a rain barrel, which connects to your roof gutter's downspout.

HIGH-TECH FIX Install a smart irrigation system with a sensor; it'll run only when needed. (You can control some models remotely.) Look for the WaterSense label. The EPA has estimated that these systems can save the average home 8,800 gallons of water a year.



TRY AN ECO MOWER

They don't use gas or make a lot of noise. A REEL, OR PUSH, MOWER is best for small spaces. The blades work like scissors, slicing as they turn. Get them sharpened to ensure a clean cut. FOR LARGER LAWNS, go electric. Fueled by rechargeable batteries, most models cut just like gas-powered ones without the air pollution. Also consider a robot mower as an option. FORGO THE LEAF BLOWER, not only do they turn good neighbors into mortal enemies when used on a serene Sunday morning, they are both noise and gas polluters.

CUT WITH CARE

Adjust the setting on your mower to cut to three to three and a half inches high. Longer blades of grass will have more surface area for the sun to shine on, which means more photosynthesis and a healthier lawn. Also welcome diversity, such as clover, which naturally adds beneficial nitrogen to your soil.

LIVE WITH LESS LAWN

If you love the look of one but not the constant care, consider a no-mow option, like a fine-fescue blend; it has a plush, billowy texture and it's low-maintenance. Think of your lawn as an area rug and not wall-to-wall carpeting. Grow native ground covers, and expand the footprint of existing perennial beds.

800 million gallons of gas are used to power lawn mowers annually, according to the EPA, producing significant amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Nitrogen oxide emissions from lawn-care equipment equal the yearly emissions from 30 million cars.

NOURISH SOIL NATURALLY

MULCH Instead of bagging cut grass, mulch clippings back into the lawn (use a mulching blade or attachment). They'll help feed the earth and stay out of packed landfills. FERTILIZE Use compost and let leaves and all organic matter decompose naturally to feed your soil—for free.



PLANT TWO-THIRDS FOR THE BIRDS

Fill your garden with 70 percent native plants to provide a habitat for bees, birds, and butterflies. Grow at least three different kinds of flowering plants that bloom successively to give pollinators a continuous food supply, and add shrubs for shelter.

PLANT A NATIVE TREE (OR THREE)

The benefits are boundless. Trees clean the air we breathe, provide habitats for wildlife, help prevent storm runoff by holding soil in place, and combat global warming by absorbing CO2 and other particles and reducing air temperature through respiration. Plus, they conserve energy at home (and save you money) by providing shade in summer and muffling wind in winter. Join the National Arbor Day Foundation, and you'll receive 10 free trees to plant. (Memberships start at just \$10; go to arboraday.org.)

ATTRACT POLLINATORS

80 million pounds of pesticides, which kill good and bad insects alike, are used on U.S. lawns annually, says the Audubon Society.

Without the wildlife that pollinates plants, we'd lose our fruits and vegetables, and about 80 percent of flowers. Invite them into your yard by planting natives and avoiding pesticides. Also make sure nothing has been grown with neonicotinoids—insecticides that render a plant toxic to pollinators.

CREATE HABITATS

Instead of carting it off by the truckload, Perfect Earth Project founder Edwina von Gal creates stunning sculptures out of debris gathered from her yard. Weave branches into "nests" or stack logs into artful piles—and watch the songbirds, reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals come take shelter. These forms will eventually biodegrade and enrich the soil.

GET THE DOWNLOAD To learn more about nature-based gardening, visit the Perfect Earth Project's website and download its free guide at perfectearthproject.org.

LOVE BUGS

If an infestation happens in your garden, avoid all pesticides, which kill indiscriminately and leach into our water systems. Instead, be patient and wait for this tiny yet powerful task force to arrive—it will. Learn how to spot their nymphs and eggs.

LADYBUGS More than just cute, they gobble up the aphids, scale, mites, and mealybugs.

LACEWINGS The larvae of these elegant fliers feast on spider mites, thrips, and whiteflies, and can devour as many as 100 aphids a day.

ASSASSIN BUGS As their common name hints, they target hornworms, leafhoppers, and Colorado potato beetles.

PARASITIC WASPS These non-stingers lay eggs inside host bugs like Japanese beetles, gypsy-moth caterpillars, and cabbage worms. When they hatch, the larvae eat their prey.