

# Changing Homeowner's Lawn Care Behavior to Reduce Nutrient Losses in New England's Urbanizing Watersheds - 2008

- Carried out by Universities of New Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont Cooperative Extension and Plymouth State University
- Funded by USDA National Water Program
- Focused on do-it-yourselfers in urbanizing communities in New England – interviews and survey

**Green Grass & Clear Water**  
Water quality friendly lawn care and fertilizer recommendations for northern New England

According to a recent survey, it's likely that you and your neighbors believe having a lawn that is safe for the environment is very important.\* However, some lawn care practices can create water quality problems. Excess nutrients (including nitrogen and phosphorus found in fertilizers) that run off our properties into local waterbodies can trigger algal blooms that cloud water and rob it of oxygen.

Many of us enjoy the time we spend working on our lawns and are willing to try new practices as long as our lawns continue to look good.\* Here are some easy practices for creating and maintaining a truly healthy lawn – attractive and safer for the environment.

For additional resources, please visit:  
[www.extension.unh.edu/Sustainable-Landscapes-and-Turf](http://www.extension.unh.edu/Sustainable-Landscapes-and-Turf)

**Simple Recommendations for Every Lawn**

- 1. Choose the Right Grass Seed**
  - Consider limiting lawn area to locations where grass will grow easily and will actually be used for outdoor activities.
  - Choose grass varieties that require less maintenance. For northern New England, choose seed mixes with higher percentages of turf-type tall fescues, compact-type fall fescues and/or fine fescues. Choose mixes with smaller percentages of Kentucky bluegrass and/or perennial ryegrass.
  - In shaded areas, select shade-tolerant turf grasses like fine-leaf and tall fescues.
  - Up to 10% of total seed mix can be white clover to help fix nitrogen in soil naturally. Avoid clover if anyone in the household is allergic to bee stings.
- 2. Don't Overwater**
  - If irrigating, one inch of water per week is typically enough. Overwatering can lead to runoff and leaching of contaminants into groundwater.
- 3. Test Your Soil**
  - Sometimes adjusting the soil pH or organic matter are the only treatments needed to improve a lawn. If the soil test results come back as acceptable but your lawn is not, then check for other problems like pest infestations. Learn more at: [bit.ly/Test-Your-Soil](http://bit.ly/Test-Your-Soil)
- 4. Mow Smart**
  - Mow grass 3" or higher. Cut no more than 1/3 of the blade to encourage longer, stronger turf grass roots. Leave the clippings after mowing to provide a source of low release nutrients.

<http://seagrant.unh.edu>

# Key Findings – Lawn Care Nutrient Practices in New England

- Over seventy three percent (73.3%) agree or strongly agree that adopting environmentally friendly lawn care practices is important for improving water quality.
- Close to seventy seven percent (76.9%) of respondents assert that it is important that their lawn look the same as it currently does if they adopt environmentally friendly alternatives.
- Respondents are very accepting of several simple practices: 1) using fertilizers that expressly protect water quality; 2) cutting grass a higher height, and 3) leaving clippings on the lawn. Respondents indicate that it is not important that a lawn be clover-free.
- Linking the impacts of over-fertilization on water quality with a specific body of water is essential. Over seventy-nine percent (79.4%) of respondents rated that framing as important or very important when considering their own actions.

# More Key Findings and Recommendations

## Message Delivery

- Results from both the survey and interviews indicate the **timing of the messages is important**, as this is not a topic that is frequently considered outside of the **moments where lawn care decisions are made or activities undertaken**.
- As expected, the most commonly used source of information on lawn care is product packaging. This reinforces that a **point of purchase effort may be essential for success**.
- Media sources are not widely used or trusted.
- Master gardeners and University Extension are considered the most trustworthy information sources by far, so being clear about affiliations and providing additional sources of information associated with these groups is useful and appropriate.

# EXERCISE: Choose a Business Objective and Apply the 5 Ps of Marketing

- A. Increase the number of rain gardens you install and maintain.
- B. Increase the number of pervious pavement systems you install and maintain.
- C. Increase the number of waterfront properties you provide water quality sensitive landscaping for.
- D. Increase the number of water quality-friendly lawns you install and/or maintain.
- E. Other?

# EXERCISE: Choose a Business Objective and Apply the 5 Ps of Marketing

- A. Increase the number of rain gardens you install **and/or** maintain.
- Set a target for number of rain gardens to install next season?
  - Or a target for maintenance contracts
  - With whom? Municipalities/public properties, commercial properties, homeowners?
- B. Increase the number of pervious pavement systems you install **and/or** maintain.
- Install (a target no.) of pervious pavement systems instead of impermeable patios or walkways.
  - Define the potential clients
- C. Increase the number of waterfront properties you provide water quality **friendly** landscaping for.
- D. Increase the number of water quality-friendly lawns **or landscapes** you **design, install and/or maintain**.
- A. Or target a number of square feet that you will design install or maintain using the water-quality friendly practices
- B. What types of practices or design elements will you emphasize?
- E. Other?

# People

- Which customers should you target for your WQ-friendly products and services?
- What barriers do you anticipate in reaching them or convincing them?
- Who do they influence or who are they influenced by?
- What motivates them?
- What incentives are likely to be effective for them?
- How do you deliver customer satisfaction? How do you know?

For more information, please contact

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