

Introducing the “Freedom Lawn”

An Invitation from the Roxbury Conservation Commission



As New England residents prepare for the warmer weather ahead and the Spring gardening season, the Conservation Commission would like to share a few tips for the future enjoyment of your lawn and property. Our goal is to provide information on an important issue directly affecting the health of our families, pets, environment, and wildlife pertaining to the increased use of fertilizers and pesticides.



Health and environmental concerns from the chemicals found in these fertilizers and pesticides have led to growing state and nation-wide movements. The Town of Roxbury actively supports these beneficial efforts and the Conservation Commission encourages property owners to consider an organic approach to lawn care, as a variety of natural initiatives have successfully evolved throughout the State. The objective is to present safe and affordable alternatives by incorporating natural land management, while lending awareness to the health risks associated with mainstream products commonly used for property maintenance.

The average homeowner recognizes that an amazing amount of time and money is devoted to the “perfect” lawn. The Milford, CT Environmental Concerns Coalition recently requested residents to oppose the time consuming efforts of watering and applying fertilizers and pesticides to maintain a green turf. Residents were asked to consider allowing the natural progression of flora to develop into the landscapes and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Enter the Freedom Lawn...

- Freedom from dangerous pesticides
- Freedom from watering
- Freedom from ground & water pollution
- Freedom from micro-managing
- Freedom from added costs
- Freedom to play more



The Freedom Lawn

The term “Freedom Lawn” was developed by three Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies Scholars; Herbert Bormann, Diana Balmori and Gordon Geballe. They proposed a naturalistic approach to lawn maintenance allowing unrestricted growth of grasses, clover, wild daisies, chamomile, yarrow, rye, fescue and other broad-leafed plants commonly regard as weeds. The program discourages the use of lawn fertilizers which give rise to ground and water pollution and contribute to serious health issues for organisms in contact with these treated lawns.

The Hazardous Waste Day last August, sponsored by the Housatonic Resources Recovery Authority, was well attended by area residents. One may have noticed that leftover household insecticides and lawn care products were collected and disposed of in a stringent, regulated method. These lawn and garden herbicides, insecticides, and fertilizers including: **the weed killer 2, 4-D, Bifenthrin, MCP, Dicamba, Diuron, Atrazine, Naphthalene, and prior to year 2004, Diazinon**, are all common forms of pesticides associated with neurological damage and cancer. Their warning labels advise: *Caution, Warning or Danger and Keep out of the Reach of Children* for good reason. Increased health issues, particularly affecting children, have been sited with a direct correlation to pesticide use. An accumulation of toxins into soil and ground water leads to seepage within our drinking supply, generate additional health concerns. Please review of contents found within your fertilizers and pesticides as you plan ahead to this gardening season.

The Freedom Lawn initiative, along with the voluntary elimination of pesticides and fertilizers on lawns for the protection of our health and environment, is taking hold throughout our communities. The State of Connecticut is a leader in this movement, with legislation mandating organic lawn care for both private and public schools from K-8 (ref. Bill S.B. 916; H.B. 5276). Local towns have similarly promoted educational programs regarding the adverse long-term health and environmental affects of lawn chemicals, while seeking to enhance the health of their communities.

The Roxbury Conservation Commission will offer one of two seminars scheduled for **Saturday April 10th from 1-3pm at the Roxbury Town Hall** to provide tips on; Pest Management, Organic Lawn Care and Gardening tips. The second seminar offered in late spring will pertain to; Protecting Wells and Watershed, Organic Produce and the Health Affects of Lawn and Gardening Chemicals. We invite you to review the following recommendations and welcome in a healthy lawn and property care approach this coming Spring!



Simple Steps to Organic Lawn Care (Carlisle Pesticide Awareness Group, June 3, 2004)

The easiest, most cost effective way to a beautiful, healthy lawn is to work with nature, not against it. A healthy lawn needs nutrients and microbe-rich soil to develop deep rooted, dense turf that competes successfully with weeds. Dense turf is beautiful and low maintenance. It naturally resists drought, insects and diseases.

Pesticides are not necessary for a beautiful lawn. In fact, they can do more harm than good. They kill the microbial life necessary for healthy soil and can kill the pest's natural enemies. This invites disease and insect infestation, which leads to more pesticide use and traps you in an unhealthy, costly chemical cycle.



Basic lawn care tips:

- Each Fall, spread 1/4" compost or sprinkle organic fertilizer on your lawn
- Mulch the top layer of leaves for healthy grass in the spring
- Overseed in both spring and fall with a mix of hardy grasses
- Mow high – 3". Keep mower blades sharp
- Leave grass clippings on lawn as fertilizer
- Water only when soil is dry 6" down. 1" water per watering
- Strive for a soil pH around 6.8
- Avoid high nitrogen chemical fertilizers which kill healthy organisms and attract unwanted pests
- Avoid "organic" sludge-based fertilizers that contain heavy metals and toxins (read label carefully)

Soil Testing

Get your soil tested for free. Please visit <http://ct.gov/caes/cwp/view.asp?a=28368&q=378202> or contact the CT Soil Test Laboratory in New Haven at (203)-974-8521. Soil samples are tested for texture, organic matter, pH, nitrate nitrogen, ammonium nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium. Except for pH and texture, all results are expressed as high, medium, and low. If necessary, the CT Soil Test Lab can perform tests for salts, micronutrients, and contaminants.



Suggested Reading and Resource Listing

Below are a few resources and related websites in order to learn more about reducing pesticide use:

- <http://www.Milfordecc.org>
- <http://www.SafeLawns.org>
- <http://www.Beyondpesticides.org>
- Suburban Safari by Hannah Holmes (Bloomsbury Publishing, NY 2005)
- Redesigning the American Lawn by Herbert Bormann, Diana Balmori, Gordon Geballe (Yale Univ., 2001)
- The Chemical-Free Lawn by Warren Schultz (Rodale Press, Emmaus, PA, 1989)
- American Green: The Obsessive Quest for the Perfect Lawn by Ted Steinberg (W.W. Norton & Co, NY, 2006)