

## Are you considering hiring a company to provide organic lawn-care services?

Here are some important questions to ask:

1. *Do you offer an organic, pesticide-free lawn-care program? What is it?* The company representative should be able to give you a detailed answer and a written description of the products used.

2. *Are you NOFA accredited? What is your organic lawn-care experience?* Companies certified by the Northeast Organic Farming Association (NOFA) are best. Next are companies with some experience providing organic lawn care.

3. *May I have references?*  
Be sure to ask for—and contact—references.

4. *Do you have licenses and insurance?*  
The insurance is your protection in case a contractor gets hurt on your property. Also, contractors applying any weed killer, insecticide or fungicide should be licensed. Verify a contractor's license by calling the state Department of Environmental Protection pesticide management program, 860 424-3369.

5. *What are your professional affiliations?*  
Membership in NOFA or other professional groups such as the Professional Lawn Care Association of America or state organizations indicates the contractor is committed to a standard of professionalism.

6. *Does your company do a soil test before deciding on a maintenance approach? How do you build up the soil based on your results?*  
If the company uses a "one size fits all" approach without any soil testing, or talks more about chemicals than biology of the soil, you're probably better off with a different contractor.

### For more information about Project Green Lawn

Contact Kim O'Rourke, Middletown Recycling Coordinator, at 344-3526 or go to the City website at [cityofmiddletown.com](http://cityofmiddletown.com) (go to the Public Works Department page and scroll down to *Project Green Lawn*).

# Project GREEN LAWN

Healthy lawns  
for a healthy community!



Chem-free Lawns

## Project Green Lawn

Project Green Lawn is a City of Middletown public awareness campaign to encourage residents and businesses to maintain healthy lawns free of chemicals that are harmful to people, pets and the environment.



### Reducing the use of lawn-care chemicals fosters a healthier community. Be part of our drive to limit exposure!

**Our Yards**—Get started with your own chemical-free lawn using the information in this brochure, or hire a landscaper certified in organic lawn care.

**Our Parks**—Steps are being taken to keep our parks healthy by maintaining them with organic fertilizers and strong limits on pesticide use. To learn more contact the Parks and Recreation Dept. at 343-6627.

**Our Schools**—Recognizing that children are especially vulnerable, the state has banned use of lawn-care pesticides at daycare centers and K-8 schools. The law also requires that schools notify you of any pesticide application (indoors or out) when requested. Contact your child's school to request notification.

**Our Rights**—The state notification law requires that land-care companies and homeowners post signs along property boundaries when pesticides are applied. You can also sign up for the State Pesticide Registry for advance warning of commercial spraying on abutting properties (go to [www.ct.gov/dep](http://www.ct.gov/dep); search "pesticide management").



## The Health Hazards of Lawn-care Chemicals

Lawns maintained with synthetic fertilizers and pesticides pose a serious health threat to people, pets and the environment.

Lawn-care chemicals, applied by homeowners or companies, contain potent toxins that kill weeds and pests. Scientific evidence shows that these chemicals also affect people, especially children, and pets.



Exposure to certain lawn-care pesticides has been associated with increased risk of **asthma**, several types of childhood and adult **cancers**, **birth defects**, **reproductive problems**, **nervous** and **immune system disorders**, and **liver** and **kidney damage**.

Research reported by the National Institutes of Health indicates that children may be particularly sensitive to the cancer-causing effects of pesticides. And, dogs whose owners use a popular lawn-care chemical found in most "weed and feed" products were twice as likely to contract cancer, according to a National Cancer Institute study.

Lawn chemicals also make their way into the environment through rain runoff and are passed along through the food chain, contaminating fish and wildlife. Many Canadian towns have banned the use of pesticides on private lawns due to health and environmental concerns.

You decide: Are all of the risks associated with lawn-care chemicals worth it, especially when safe alternatives exist?

## How to Have a Healthy Lawn Without Harmful Chemicals

Fortunately, there are chemical-free strategies for a truly green lawn—a lawn maintained without synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. Your lawn can look well-kept without putting your family's and community's health at risk.

### DO IT YOURSELF:

**1. Mow High:** Set your mower to 3 inches. Short grass and over watering promote shallow root growth, weeds and thatch. Leave the grass



clippings on the lawn—this provides at least 40% of the nutrients your lawn needs.

**2. Fertilize,** as needed, with a slow release 100% organic fertilizer such as seaweed compost, bone meal, or blood meal in the spring and late summer. Compost or fresh compost tea will also help correct the soil's biological balance.

**3. Aerate** your lawn twice a year with aerator shoes or a motorized aerator. Soil compaction is one of the largest causes of weed problems. Aerating, or removing small plugs of soil, allows air, water and nutrients to reach the roots of the grass.

**4. De-thatch:** Thatch is a dense layer of grass stems and roots on the soil surface. When thatch is 1/2" or more, it can prevent roots from establishing, making grass susceptible to insects and disease. Reduce thatch by aerating, top-dressing with organic matter, or power raking.

**5. Reseed** your lawn every spring or fall with a certified first class grass seed compatible with the growing conditions in your yard. Seeding grass in established lawns can reduce weed problems.

**6. Water** only when needed, and avoid frequent, shallow watering, which encourages Japanese beetle grub infestation, fungus and root rot. Once a healthy lawn is established, water only after seeding.



**7. Test your soil health** every 3-5 years. The CT Agricultural Experiment Station provides free soil analysis for CT residents (Search for "soil test" at [www.ct.gov/caes](http://www.ct.gov/caes)).

**8. Adjust pH:** Ideal lawn pH is 6.3-6.8. For low pH (high acidity) add ground limestone. For high pH (high alkalinity) add sulphur. One sign of high pH is a dandelion infestation.

### QUICK & EASY!

**Make the switch to an organic lawn-care service. Ask for our insert with a list of local providers and sources for organic lawn-care products. Call Middletown Recycling: 344-3526.**

## Lawn Alternatives: Ground Covers, Flower Beds, Trees and Shrubs

Try growing a variety of plants and promote a healthy, diverse ecosystem in your yard.

1. Plant groupings of trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers that are compatible with each other and the existing environmental conditions (e.g. sunlight, soil and water).
2. Select insect or disease-resistant plant varieties.
3. Choose native plants adapted to our climate and conditions. Check out the CT River Coastal Conservation District plant sale each spring for a variety of CT natives ([www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal](http://www.conservect.org/ctrivercoastal)).
4. Use ground covers that require less maintenance than grass and may be more suitable for the site's conditions.

## Weeds and Pests: Non-Toxic Treatments

Using herbicides and pesticides to tackle weeds and pests can actually damage your lawn. These poisons also kill good organisms that help produce nutrients plants need. This weakens the grass, fosters thatch and encourages disease.

There are many safe, nontoxic alternatives for getting rid of common weeds and insects. Here are a few suggestions:

**1. Dandelions:** Pull them out when at their weakest—when they're blooming—by digging out 4-5 inches of the root. This may have to be done a few times throughout the season. Be sure to at least pluck the flowers before they go to seed.

**2. Crabgrass** can be eliminated by high mowing and use of organic fertilizers. Healthy grass growth will crowd out the crabgrass.

**3. Weeds in driveway** or sidewalk cracks can be controlled by treating with white vinegar.

**4. Grubs** can be controlled with beneficial nematodes (natural microscopic parasites), available from a variety of sources. Neem, a spray made from an extract of the Indian Neem tree, is also effective against grubs (sold as Margosan-O, BioNeem or Scanmask).



Monarch butterflies are an added benefit of a chem-free lawn.



**5. Japanese beetles:** Hand pick as many beetles as you can and drop them in a bucket of soapy water. Milky Spore can also be used to control Japanese and Oriental Beetle grubs.

## Re-defining Weeds

What is a weed? Until the 1950s, clover was included in lawn seed mixes for its soft texture and ability to contribute nitrogen to the soil. Then the American lawn industry began promoting pesticide use and encouraged the public to view clover as a weed. Many plants considered weeds—such as Veronica and violets—are actually listed in wildflower books.

If your lawn looks green, and most importantly, is a healthy place for your children and pets to play, can you re-think your definition of "weed"?

## What More Can You Do?

Are you concerned about others who use lawn-care chemicals in your neighborhood or community?

- Get more involved in the Project Green Lawn campaign by contacting Kim O'Rourke, Middletown's Recycling Coordinator, at 344-3526.
- Talk to people about the harmful effects of using pesticides—both on private property and in public areas like playing fields
- Register with the state Pesticide Notification Registry on the CT DEP website for advance warning of nearby spraying.

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