

Clean Water is Up to You series
Brown lawn? Here's how to really go green!
Brodhead Watershed Association

Watering home landscapes makes up almost a third of home water use in America — nearly nine billion gallons a day nationwide. When you add the unhealthy effects of pesticides and fertilizers on safe, abundant drinking water, lawns have a lot of explaining to do.

After a summer of brown grass and endless, fruitless watering, here's an idea: Instead of investing all that time, energy and water in grass, go on a lawn diet.

Quit the finicky mowing around trees and shrubs. You can dig up the sod out to the drip line — or just let falling leaves accumulate and shade out the grass. You'll save on mowing, chemicals, and on raking.

Where the grass really browned out this year, let that area go a little wild. Plant some native meadow grasses like switchgrass, little bluestem, and indiangrass this fall. Add a few clumps of Joe Pye weed, goldenrod, and bee balm. And welcome any volunteers that show up, like phlox, daisies and black-eyed susans. In a year or two, you'll have a no-maintenance native meadow.

What about those moist shady areas where you struggle to get the darned grass to grow? Give up the fight! A few native rhododendrons will thrive there, along with tall ostrich ferns, hay scented fern, native wild ginger, and wild geranium.

Decide where you actually *need* some turf grass, based on what you and your family enjoy. Maybe that means a patch of lawn for games, outdoor dining, stargazing, or playing with the dog. Connect those areas to house, garage, and shed with grassy walkways, and you'll have an interesting, functional, low-maintenance yard that's good for birds and pollinators, drinking water, and humans.

Did you know that running a typical gas lawnmower or leaf blower for an hour pollutes as much as driving a car 300 miles? In the spring, you could

retire that polluter, and go to a rechargeable electric. No maintenance, ear-splitting noise, or breathing in those fumes — and lots of time saved to enjoy the new peace and quiet of your natural surroundings.



Electric lawn mowers save on gas, oil, and maintenance, offsetting their often higher purchase price. And you'll never have to make a special trip to get gas again.