



William T. Kemper Center for Home Gardening

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Sustainability: Ways to Go Green in Your Lawn and Garden

Practices for going green in your garden fall into 6 major areas:

Conserve water and control water runoff

Lawn Water plants only when they need it. Lawns only need about 1 inch of rain a week. Set up a rain gauge to record weekly rainfall.

For lawns, use a low-angle spray instead of oscillating sprinklers as they result in less water loss due to evaporation.

Position watering devices to prevent water loss by water falling in storm gutters, walkways or in the street.

Garden Use drip irrigation or soaker hoses instead of oscillating sprinklers as they result in less water loss due to evaporation.

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Mulch beds to help retain soil moisture

Set up a rain barrel to collect rain water for watering plants. Click [here](#) for a source for custom made rain barrels in the St. Louis area.

Plant a rain garden or develop a swale to help retain water in the soil and prevent runoff.

Install a cistern to collect water to use for plants, washing clothes, bathing and other non-potable uses as local ordinances allow.

Investigate the use of grey water use in your area.

Remove hard surfaces in your landscape to allow water to percolate into the soil and not run off in storm gutters. Replace with a porous surface if needed.

Don't use the hose to wash off your driveway, deck or walkway. Instead use a broom or an

electric blower. Gas-powered blowers produce more pollutants.

Reduce fossil-fuel energy use

Lawn Reduce the size of your lawn by replacing some of it with beds of shrubs or drought tolerant perennials.

Have your lawn mower serviced regularly so it runs efficiently and pollutes less.

Pull a few lawn weeds by hand. This is often more effective and less damaging than resorting to chemical sprays.

Don't mow your lawn more frequently than required. Keep the mower blade sharp.

Replace your gas-powered mower with an electric one or switch to one of the new, user-friendly push mowers.

Garden Get some exercise and do some hand digging.

Pull weeds by hand. This is often more effective and less damaging than resorting to chemical sprays.

Add landscape lighting only where it is really needed. And when used, use compact fluorescent bulbs or solar-powered lights. Low voltage lighting also uses less electricity and is safer for outdoor use.

Cut down on holiday lights and invest in the new LED lights that use a lot less energy.

Demand higher accountability of local governments for their expenditures. Do we really need all the night light pollution around us? As energy prices rise demand that local governments focus on what is most important in their expenditures. Reducing expenditures on lighting buildings, parking lots, gardens, etc at night may just be a waste of money that could be better spent elsewhere.

Deal with yard and garden "waste" in a sound way

Lawn Collecting lawn clipping is not necessary and actually depletes the soil of nutrients and organic matter. Grass clipping do NOT lead to thatch buildup. Instead, use a mulching lawn mower so lawn clippings don't have to be collected.. If collected, lawn clippings can be added to your compost pile.

Whatever you do, don't send leaves and other plant-based garden waste to a landfill. Instead use, support, or work to develop a yard waste recycling program in your neighborhood.

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Ideally, develop your own compost pile so you can return the valuable plant material, e.g.

leaves, back to the soil in your yard.

Reuse plastic, clay and other pots in your garden. Don't send them to a landfill. And, when a plastic pot has enjoyed a good life, send it to be recycled. In St. Louis the Missouri Botanical Garden has offered a pot recycling service since 1998.

If you want to use a chipper-shredder for light use, electric ones result in less air pollution than gas-powered.

Plant Selection

Lawns Select more drought tolerant grasses that require less mowing.

Garden Replace plants that require a lot of watering with plants that are more drought tolerant. Native plants may be good choices.

Select plants that perform well in your area and have few problems. In the lower Midwest the [Plants of Merit](#) program offers some excellent plants for the area.

Promote diversity in your yard and garden. Plant a wide variety of plants, which can provide habitats for beneficial insects and reduce damage from periodic diseases. You are also helping to preserve genetic diversity.

Avoid planting invasive plant species.

Garden Design

Lawns Reduce the size of your lawn.

Garden Locate trees to help shade and cool your home in the summer. By selecting deciduous trees you can still benefit by receiving warming winter rays.

Plant a windbreak to reduce winter heating bills.

On new construction, a green roof might be an option.

Use only Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) wood for decks, fences, and other garden structures. This certification help guarantee that the wood was produced in a responsible, sustainable way.

Support movements that preserve corridors of native plants in your area.

Plant Maintenance

Lawns Get a soil test before you add fertilizer and or lime to your lawn and follow the recommendation. Over fertilizing can lead to excess plant growth, which can be more susceptible to diseases. Trying to grow grass in soil outside a grass's recommended pH range will result in poor growth.

Fertilizer runoff can pollute streams and groundwater. Apply them properly.

Learn to tolerate minor insect damage in your lawn. Spraying with a pesticide can place harmful chemicals in the environment and may also kill beneficials or damage nearby plants.

Don't over water. This can lead to soft growth that is more susceptible to disease.

Follow a proper maintenance schedule for your area.

Tolerate low levels of weeds in your lawn. Seek to develop a strong, healthy lawn that can out compete the weeds.

Garden Learn to tolerate minor insect damage in your yard and garden and work to increase the number of beneficials. ***Learn to distinguish the good from the bad!*** Spraying with a pesticide can place harmful chemicals in the environment and may also kill beneficials or damage nearby plants.

Learn which plant diseases are harmful to your plants and may warrant control and which are just a cosmetic nuisance that will not affect the health of your tree, shrub, or perennial. For example, leaf spot diseases and leaf galls are very common on trees but few if any require treatment.

Get a soil test before you add fertilizer and or lime to your yard or garden and follow the recommendation. Over fertilizing can lead to excess plant growth, which can be more susceptible to diseases. Trying to grow a plant in a soil outside its recommended pH range will result in poor growth or death. Also, fertilizer runoff can pollute streams and groundwater.