



Chesapeake Bay Foundation “Ten Steps to a Bay-Friendly Lawn”

To help protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay watershed, here are some simple steps you can take:

1. Test the soil

Find out what level of nutrients your lawn already has and what it needs before you consider using fertilizers or chemicals. Many people apply fertilizer to the lawn that isn't needed or used, and unfortunately, it often ends up running into the nearest Bay tributary and damages its health. Your local university cooperative extension service has soil test kits available at a very low cost. (see Resource List below)

2. Fertilize only when and where necessary

Many people over apply fertilizer to their lawns, which contributes to nutrient loading that pollutes the Bay. After testing soil, use minimal amounts of fertilizer only if needed and be sure to keep it off of pavements, sidewalks and driveways. If fertilizer is needed, it is usually not needed more than once per year; fall is the best time to fertilize. Never use fertilizer for any other purposes such as de-icing.

3. Leave grass clippings on the lawn

As an alternative to chemical fertilizers, leave grass clippings on your lawn to provide the soil with many nutrients. It is also a great way to recycle the grass with very low maintenance.

4. Use compost as fertilizer

Another fertilizer alternative for the garden is to create a healthy compost pile that reuses food waste, grass clippings, yard waste, and other natural ingredients to make a nutrient and mineral-rich compost that can be added to garden soil to increase productivity and health of the soil. You can also purchase compost in bags from garden centers.

5. Mow the lawn at the proper height

Set your mower blade height to 3-inch and make sure the blades are kept sharp. Many people cut their grass too short, which never allows the grass to get ahead of the weeds or develop a strong root system to sustain through drought. A general rule of thumb is to never cut more than one third of the blade. If you allow your grass to stay higher, you will shade out many weeds and develop healthy roots system. Consider using a push mower in place of a motorized mower.

6. Reduce use of pesticides and herbicides by at least 50%

Toxic chemicals such as pesticides and herbicides can poison your yard's balanced ecosystem by killing the natural predators and native plants that help your yard maintain a healthy diversity of living organisms. Take the time to monitor the natural systems in your yard so that you will understand what kinds of problems might occur and can take appropriate action for that specific problem. Adopt integrated pest management strategies around your home so that you can reduce or eliminate your use of chemicals. Make sure that you or your lawn care professional only use chemicals when all other options have been exhausted and then use the minimal amount needed. Other alternatives to chemicals include using beneficial insects and attracting natural predators to your yard.

7. Plant native trees and shrubs

A diversity of native plants will help your yard have less pests, disease, and weed problems as well as provide valuable food, shelter, and cover for all kinds of critters. Ask your local nursery to provide you with a list of native trees and shrubs they offer or get advice from the cooperative extension service.

8. Provide wildlife habitat

Wildlife such as hummingbirds, hawks, chipmunks, fox and other birds and small mammals need a source of food, water, and shelter, particularly in areas that we've lost so much habitat as in urban and industrial areas. Plant trees and shrubs that provide a food source, especially in the winter, and provide a water source. Make sure there is adequate tree and shrub cover around food and water sources.

9. Reduce lawn size

How much lawn area do you really need? Assess your lawn use and reduce the grassy area to the minimal amount needed. Plant buffers of native trees, shrubs, and gardens in the remaining yard that will soak up excess nutrients and prevent soil erosion.

10. Water lawn properly

Grass lawns naturally go dormant during the drier summer season. When wet weather returns, so will your lush green lawn. If you do choose to water your lawn, water rarely and thoroughly until water can no longer be easily absorbed by the soil.

Resource List

Lawns:

In Maryland, to order free publications on lawn care, lawn renovation, "Lawns and the Chesapeake Bay," contact the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension (Home and Garden Information Center), 800-342-2507, www.hgic.umd.edu

To order soil test kits:

University of Maryland Cooperative Extension (Home and Garden Information Center) has a list of regional laboratories who will do soil tests at cost, 800-342-2507, www.agnr.umd.edu/SoilTesting

Pennsylvania Cooperative Extension Services, contact your local county extension office or search the directory www.extension.psu.edu/extmap.html

Virginia Cooperative Extension Services, contact your local county extension office or search the directory www.ext.vt.edu/offices

Meadows and Warm Season Grasses:

Chesapeake Native Nursery (301- 270-4534, 326 Boyd Avenue # 2, Takoma Park, MD 20912), native plants propagated from indigenous seed sources, mail order, nursery location in Riva, MD. Owner Sara Tangren. www.chesapeakenatives.com.

Ernst Conservation Seeds (800) 873-3321. 9006 Mercer Pike, Meadville, PA 16335. Seeds of native and non-native grasses, wildflowers, wetland plants and shrubs; live stakes for streambank restoration, www.ernstseed.com

Prairie Nursery Inc., P. O. Box 306, Westfield, WI 53964, 800-476-9453 (800-GRO WILD), source for mid-western native and non-native meadow seeds and plants, information on starting a meadow, plant selection, <http://www.prairienursery.com>

Native Plant Information:

Delaware Native Plant Society, www.delawarenativeplants.org , 302-674-5187

National Arboretum, 3501 New York Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 245-2726, www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/faqs/nativeaq1.html

Maryland Native Plant Society, P.O. Box 4877 Silver Spring MD 20914, www.mdflora.org

Maryland Department of National Resources, State Forest Tree Nursery, www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/nursery 1-800-TREESMD

Pennsylvania Native Plant Society, P.O. Box 281 State College PA 16804-0281 www.pawildflower.org

Virginia Native Plant Society, 540-837-1600, www.vnps.org/

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, <http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov>

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Maryland native plant lists to download: www.nps.gov/plants/pubs/nativesMD/

USFWS, "Native Plants for Wildlife Habitat and Conservation Landscaping," Chesapeake Bay Watershed. This color guide provides planting requirements and uses for 400 native plants. Write to: USFWS, 177 Admiral Cochrane Drive, Annapolis, MD 21401 or call Mary Cordovilla, 410-573-4591.

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CBF Bay-Friendly Landscaping

www.cbf.org/landscaping