

**Greening Your Lawn Care Service:
Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Lawn
by
Go Green Wilmette**

Having a green--or environmentally sustainable--lawn isn't as hard or expensive as most people think. Most green lawn practices actually require less work and less money than traditional methods. In the long run, they also contribute to climate resilience in our area by keeping our local ecosystem healthier. Contact your lawn care provider and make some or all of the simple, easy requests outlined below. When you make your preferences known, you are helping them move toward providing more sustainable services to all their customers.

Ask your lawn care company about the following greener choices:

Mowing

- **Delay your yard cleanup in the spring.** Don't mow or blow leaves until late in spring to give beneficial insects time to emerge from winter hibernation. Consider keeping a pile of brush in one corner of your yard to provide habitat for native bees and other pollinators.
- **Have your lawn company come less often, and ask them to cut your grass higher.** EPA specialists recommend leaving your grass at least three inches high. Taller grass outcompetes weeds and withstands drought, reducing the need for herbicides and watering.
- **Use a mulching mower to deposit clippings on your lawn.** Instead of bagging, leave your finely chopped grass clippings to decompose quickly and recycle nutrients back into your lawn.
- **Have your grass clippings added to your compost pile.** If your clippings are too long to leave on your lawn, mulch and save them for future (and free!) natural fertilizer.
- **Use electric mowers, blowers, and edgers.** Not only do electric garden machines not release pollutants like carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides into the air, they are also much quieter than their gas counterparts.

Leaves and Leaf Blowers

- **“Leave the leaves.”** Fallen leaves make excellent mulch, fertilizer and habitat. Have your lawn company employ methods--such as those listed below--for recycling the nutrients in your leaves back into your yard. Delay your spring yard

cleanup until June. This leaves enough time for beneficial insects that have spent the winter in dead leaves and plant stalks to emerge.

- **Mow over leaves rather than blowing them to the curb.** A mulching mower will chop the leaves into small pieces. These small leaf bits decompose quickly and act as an organic fertilizer.
- **Use leaves, rather than wood shavings, as mulch.** Whole leaves work as well as traditional wood chip mulch. They're free, and can be used on gardens, flowerbeds, and around the bases of young trees.
- **Mulch your leaves with mowers and put them in a compost bin or a designated low-use area of your yard.** Over winter, their volume will halve, and by the end of next summer, you will have a rich, crumbly compost to fertilize your gardens and lawn.
- **Do not use gas-powered leaf blowers.** Wherever you want your leaves to end up, rakes and electric blowers decrease the noise and air pollution created by traditional gas leaf blowers.
- **Reduce any leaf blower use as much as possible.** Strong air currents created by leaf blowers destroy habitat and soil structure, harming plants and insects. Instead, rake or turn down the power to the lowest possible setting to get the job done. Avoid blowing wet (heavier) leaves. Tell your lawn service you do not want garden beds, driveways or sidewalks blown clean.
- **Insist that your company adhere to the Village of Wilmette's summer gas-powered leaf blower restrictions** from May 15 – Sept. 30th.

Lawn Improvements & Amendments

- **Fertilize only when necessary.** Fertilizing healthy lawns only encourages excess growth and means more mowing. If needed, apply organic fertilizers, like composted leaves, in early spring.
- **Stop using pesticide and herbicides.** If you do not expressly refuse the service, your lawn care company may be using harmful products as part of their "regular service." If absolutely necessary, ask about organic or natural products.
- **Spot-spray weeds *only if absolutely necessary*.** If re-seeding and growing your grass taller aren't preventing unwanted weeds, spot treat rather than blanket spraying your whole lawn. Remember, herbicides and pesticides are poisonous by nature.

- **Dethatch your lawn and reseed bare patches each fall.** Annually reseeding keeps your lawn healthy and is one of the best ways to reduce weeds.

Composting

- **Build or provide a compost bin and have your service put all lawn and garden waste into it.** Composted kitchen and yard waste together make excellent natural fertilizer for lawns and gardens.

Won't all this cost more?

No. In fact, “green” lawn care should cost less than traditional care. If your lawn company wants to charge more for “green care” mention the following:

- Blowing leaves and grass-clippings is often unnecessary for much of the season, yet is commonly done - and charged for - on a weekly basis all season long.
- Spreading leaf mulch should take no longer than spreading bagged mulch.
- Spot spraying weeds may take longer than blanket spraying, but requires much less pesticide. Overall, spot spraying shouldn't cost companies any more money than traditional methods.
- Reducing exposure to harmful noise, particulate matter, herbicides and pesticides will keep their workers healthier.

If your company insists on charging more, explain that you will get a quote from another company for more sustainable lawn care services. Be sure to acknowledge and thank them for their efforts to “go green.”

Go Green Wilmette is gathering information about companies willing to provide greener lawn care. Send us your feedback and stay tuned for more information!

www.gogreenwilmette.org