

## **Tips for Ecologically Friendly Lawn Care, Easy to Hard**

Source: *Nature's Best Hope* by Douglas W. Tallamy

### **Shrink the lawn by up to half**

1. Dig a hole and plant a native species like milkweed or bee balm.
2. Prepare a few square feet of soil and plant native species. (Dig up sod if necessary and loosen soil; possibly mix in compost and remove remaining roots before scattering seeds or planting started plants.)
3. Remove up to half of your turf grass and replace it with native plant and/or vegetable gardens; keep turf grass only for walkways and borders around your plantings to keep the yard looking neat and well-maintained. Think of lawn as an area rug, not wall-to-wall carpeting (from *Planting in a Post-Wild World* by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, quoted in *Nature's Best Hope*)

### **Remove invasive species**

1. When buying a new plant, make sure it's not invasive before adding it to your lawn or garden.
2. Read a list of invasive plant species in Wisconsin and identify any in your lawn or garden. [Terrestrial Invasive species - Regulated plants](#) (Link to the Wisconsin DNR)
3. Identify and remove invasive species from your lawn or garden.

Plant keystone genera (plants that do the most to support the food web, feeding the insects that feed the birds)

1. Visit the National Wildlife Federation's Native Plant Finder to identify keystone species for your area. <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder>
2. Plant one or two of the keystone genera listed. Perennial sunflowers, goldenrods, native willows, asters, and blueberries are especially good at helping specialist pollinators that are adapted to feed on only certain plants.
3. Replace at least a hundred square feet of turf grass with keystone genera; plant trees in groves of at least two or three near each other so their roots can interlock and support each other, and add understory shrubs for cover.

### **Network with neighbors to provide even more habitat for pollinators and other wildlife.**

1. Talk to your neighbor(s) about the importance of pollinators and why you're planting species that help feed them.
2. Buy extra plants at native plant sales for your neighbors.
3. Coordinate pollinator-friendly plantings with a neighbor and create a garden that spans both your yards.

### **Make your lawn safe for wildlife.**

1. Don't keep floodlights on more than necessary since they kill many moths on top of driving up your electric bill. Turn them off if you're not using them.
2. Install motion sensors so floodlights are only on when something activates them.
3. Install window well covers to keep toads and other small animals from getting trapped and dying in them.

### **Make your yard friendly to birds, butterflies, and other species.**

1. Avoid mowing your lawn in the evening to minimize the amount of animals you're likely to run over; keep the blades no lower than three inches.
2. Install several small "hotels" for solitary bees throughout your yard. (They're good pollinators and unlikely to sting since they're not defending a hive.) Several small ones

are better than one large one to avoid attracting disease and predators. [National Geographic Build Your Own Bee Hotel](#)

3. Install a bubbler to attract migrating and resident birds. Float some straws or corks in it so bees can perch on them to drink.

### **Create caterpillar pupation sites under your trees to provide food for birds.**

1. Put some rocks and/or a fallen log beneath trees to provide places for caterpillars to pupate.
2. Use fallen leaves as mulch rather than throwing them away and buying mulch in a bag. (This will save money and provide habitat for the caterpillars that are especially vital for feeding baby birds.)
3. Plant native groundcovers underneath trees.

### **Don't spray or fertilize your lawn.**

#### **SUMMARY OF EASY STEPS TO MAKE YOUR LAWN MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY:**

1. Water deeply and infrequently (one inch of water/week), and water early in the morning to reduce evaporation. The same is true for gardens.
2. Leave the grass 3 inches long when you mow.
3. Leave your grass clippings on the lawn.

#### **STEPS THAT ARE A BIT MORE LABOR INTENSIVE:**

1. Make sure your mower blades are sharp.
2. Test your soil every 3-5 years so you can make sure you're only applying the type and quantity of fertilizer it needs. You can have your lawn's soil tested for \$20 through Extension, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Call the Eau Claire County Extension Office, 227 1st Street West, Altoona, for details call 715.839.4712.

#### **STEPS FOR THE TRULY DEDICATED:**

1. If your current lawn has grass that's not native to this area, replace it with one or more species that are better suited to this area. (Although this will involve labor and expense, it will pay off in reduced lawn maintenance in the future.)
2. Even if you can't replace your whole lawn, take out part of it and use it for a food garden and/or a native plant garden. Raising your own vegetables will give you an economical source of organic food that hasn't lost nutrients in being shipped, and a native plant garden is both low-maintenance and good for pollinators. However, make sure you source plants from nurseries that do not treat plants with neonicotinoid pesticides, which permeate the entire plant--including its nectar and pollen-- and may remain active for years. Some stores label their plants "bee-friendly" even though they were grown from plants treated with "neonics," which affect the insects' central nervous system and are a suspected link to [colony collapse disorder](#) in domesticated honeybees as well as the rapid decline of many wild pollinator species. About 85% of the Earth's flowering plants rely on pollination by bees and other pollinators, according to [the Xerces Society](#), a nonprofit that protects wildlife through invertebrate conservation. Bees also pollinate more than 30% of all plants that produce foods and beverages consumed by humans around the world. Make sure you ask the nursery about whether or not their plants contain neonics before you make a purchase.