



*“When it comes to lawns,
less is often more. . . . More
time, more diversity, and
more money saved”*

*Overheard at a natural
landscaping conference.*

Lawns

Lawns are made up of turf grasses and form, essentially, a single plant community. They provide a place for recreation, act as a pollutant filter for stormwater runoff, and prevent erosion by stabilizing topsoil. Lawns, however, are expensive to maintain in both time and money. To look their best, lawns require near constant upkeep like mowing, edging, fertilizing, weeding, watering and pest control. Despite these drawbacks, many people enjoy large lawns for their look and utility.

Establishing a Lawn

Deciding whether to seed or sod your new lawn requires consideration of several factors. Sod provides nearly instant green color and erosion control, but is more expensive than seed. Seeding requires a bit more soil preparation than laying down sod, and includes the additional step of adding a straw cover to help retain moisture and control erosion. Seeding, of course, takes longer to develop into a lush lawn but costs less. Sod can be installed later in the fall. Both sod and seed require vigilant watering during the first four to six weeks after planting.

There are many publications available that go into detail about how to plant and care for a lawn. See the list at the end of this chapter for more information. County Extension agents can be helpful as well.

History of the Lawn

Lawns were originally created in Europe for playing games such as cricket. Lawns were generally only for the wealthy who could afford to have caretakers mow them with scythes or who owned sheep or cattle to crop the grass. This all changed in 1930 when a textile worker, named Edwin

Budding, invented the lawn mower. He modeled it after a cutter that was used in the textile factory to cut the nap of velvet to the same length.



Lawns

History of the Lawn Continued . .

David Beaulieu, landscaping author for about.com (<http://landscaping.about.com/>), writes about the early history of lawns in his online column: Your Guide to Landscaping . . .



Grass turf provides good cover for lightly used walking paths and lawns provide good links between nearby trails.

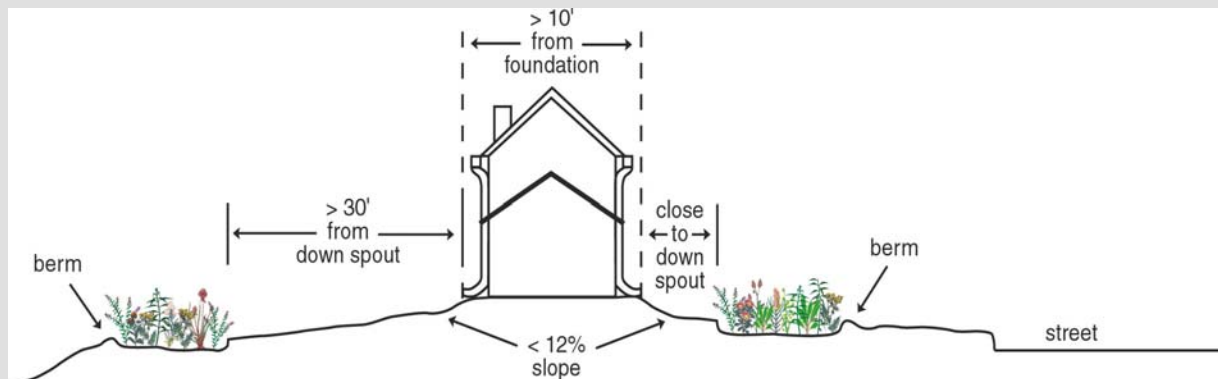
“Prior to this invention, only aristocrats could maintain lawn grass, so lawns were rare. When the lawn mower came along, suburban homeowners seized the opportunity thereby created for having a lawn of their own, thus elevating their social status (until **everybody** else did the same, that is)...I suspect, however, that there’s something more basic behind America’s obsession with lawns than is accounted for by either of these historical trends. Once again, our desire to impose our will on nature would seem to be the predominant factor behind the hegemony of the lawn...Indeed, a blade of grass is about as boring as the plant world ever gets, so there is little chance of any of the components in this arrangement stealing the show at the expense of the arrangement as a whole. And we thumb our noses at nature by extending the indoors outside, rolling out a green “carpet” that will allow us to transition freely between outdoors and inside without even tracking dirt in!”

Maintaining turf

Lawns can be cared for in a more environmentally friendly way. They should be mowed often so that the clippings do not have to be raked up. The short grass clippings will recycle nutrients back into the soil as they decom-

What’s a Rain Garden?

A rain garden is a shallow landscaped depression that can create something nice to look at, provide wildlife habitat and help prevent stormwater run-off and erosion. Rain gardens are typically created in a low or wet area of a yard or in an area that receives runoff from a down spout. Planting a rain garden in these low areas will encourage groundwater recharge. Make sure you plant your garden with plants that can tolerate both wet and dry conditions. Check out: *Rain Gardens: A Household Way to Improve Water Quality in your Community*, University of Wisconsin-Extension publication, 45 N. Charter Street, Madison, WI 53715, Publication GWQ 034. You can also download this publication at: <http://clean-water.uwex.edu/pubs/index.html>



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When fertilizing, look for a product with no phosphorus (middle number on the front of the fertilizer bag will be 0). Since most lawns already have an over abundance of phosphorus, adding more will not improve the grass but only make it more likely that the extra phosphorus will runoff your lawn into a local waterway, where it will feed algae growth and lower water quality.

Weed and insect control can be done in many ways. Often, homeowners use commercially available products which, if used improperly, can have negative effects on the insects, birds and other animals that live in or near your lawn. If chemical weed and insect control are necessary, use these products in moderation and follow the manufactures application instructions. Keep in mind there are alternative biological controls for most lawn weeds and pests. Common examples are herbicidal and insecticidal soaps and the use of corn gluten meal for pre-emergence broadleaf weed control.

Several mechanical methods of lawn maintenance can be incorporated to reduce stress on the environment. These include pulling weeds by hand, composting extra leaves and clippings so that they do not end up in a land fill, and planting native plants that can survive our harsh winters without much intervening care. The addition of rain gardens will boost the ability of your lawn to control and clean up stormwater runoff.

Attracting Wildlife

Turf grass does not attract much wildlife beyond rabbits and robins. However, by enhancing your yard with a rain garden, prairie planting, native trees or shrubs, your can create micro habitats for birds and other animals.



Grassed areas can highlight and enhance other types of open space.

Lawns



Trails and paths.

One of the nice things about a lawn is that paths are largely unnecessary. However, short paths may be desired around or through naturalized areas to provide unfettered access into these habitats. See the prairie chapter for more information on building trails and paths through prairies.

Contacts:

Consulting firms and prairie seed sources These companies often have their own publications and catalogs describing procedures for converting portions of a lawn to prairie. For a list see the enclosed pamphlet in the reference section called: *Wisconsin Native Plant Sources and Restoration Consultants*

University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX) Located in every Wisconsin county, UWEX horticulture experts can help answer lawn questions and put you in touch with other resource people. To find your county office visit: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/>

Publications and other sources of information:

Backyard Conservation: Bringing Conservation from the Country Side to Your Backyard, 1998, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>,

Lawn and Garden Fertilizers, University of Wisconsin Extension Publication A3434 <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Lawn Establishment and Renovation, John C. Stier, 2000, University of Wisconsin Publication A3434 <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Lawn Maintenance, John C. Stier, 2001, University of Wisconsin Extension Publication A3435 <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Lawn Watering, University of Wisconsin Extension Publication GWQ012, <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Rain Gardens: A Household Way to Improve Water Quality in your Community, University of Wisconsin-Extension Publication GWQ 034 <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Rain Gardens: A How-to Manual for Homeowners, University of Wisconsin Publication GWQ037, 2003 <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Rethinking Yard Care, 1999, University of Wisconsin Extension Publication GWQ009, <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Sampling Lawn and Garden Soils, 1996, University of Wisconsin Extension Publications A2166, <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>

Using Biological Control Strategies for Turf, Nick Christians, 1999, Iowa State University

Options for Open Space

A resource guide for private and public land owners and managers.

Produced by the Southeast Wisconsin Fox River Partnership Team to protect, restore and enhance the natural resources of the Fox River basin.

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