

# Less Toxic Lawn Care

**It's Spring and my lawn needs help, but the products on the shelves look toxic. Can I maintain my lawn without harming the environment?**

Taking an environmental approach to lawn maintenance is not difficult and is becoming more common. We now know there is a correlation between landscape maintenance practices and water quality, and that the chemicals in lawn care products have an impact on regional biodiversity. We also know to keep chemicals away from children and pets. Removing chemical products from your lawn care regime is a good thing, and is possible to achieve without compromising your garden's appeal. You can begin immediately by following these simple steps:

1. Survey your lawn and note any damage such as bare spots or lots of weeds? Turf experts suggest completely renovating a lawn if more than 40% of it is affected, otherwise resources will continue to be wasted.
2. Determine the primary use for your lawn; who and/or what is its purpose? Is it for kids, pets or groundcover?
3. Check the environment of your lawn. Is it mostly in a sunny place or is much of it shady or under a tree? Does it have sandy, rocky or clay-like soil? Is it bordered by plants, cement?<sup>\*file32035r\*</sup>
4. What are your visual expectations? Should it look like a golf course? Do you like a large green expanse? Remember, your aesthetic preferences may hinge on the time and effort you are willing to exert.

Once you have completed your preliminary evaluations, you should confirm whether the existing turfgrass species is appropriate for your stated needs. Turf experts claim that

most lawn care problems are not caused by pests, weeds, insects, or pathogens, but rather improper maintenance practices or poorly chosen turfgrass species. The [UC Guide to Healthy Lawns](#), lists specific seed types for specific lawn needs. It provides an easy step-by-step process on how to repair lawns, and offers advice on all aspects of lawn care, including a year-round environmental approach called grasscycling.

Spring is here and lawns deserve attention now, before the weeds proliferate into a booming population. The UC's website provides a photo index of invasive plants and can help you identify problematic weeds in your lawn. This time of year the common enemies are broadleaves. These weeds usually have tap roots that are easy to remove now while the ground is still moist from winter rains. Try using a screw driver and a bucket instead of buying a pre-emergent or "turf builder" to cope with the problem. Or if you have a landscaping crew, ask them to skip mowing and blowing for a week and weed the lawn instead. After weeds have been removed, fill the patches with an appropriate grass seed and rake in to cover with soil. Make sure these areas receive regular watering during the germination cycle.

Another environmentally-friendly option for lawns is to accept a multitude of species growing together. Chances are your lawn is already a blend of turfgrass species, designed to carry it through both warm and cool seasons. It most likely includes invading varieties from neighboring yards too. A lawn consisting of multiple plant species can look good when properly maintained, and if weeds are removed periodically, it can be golf course quality without toxic additives.

Further online information go to: [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu); [www.acmg.ucdavis.edu](http://www.acmg.ucdavis.edu) or call the ACMG hot lines at: 925-960-9420 or 510-639-1371.

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