

Homeowner's Sustainable Yard Checklist

How "Green" can you make your yard maintenance practices?

KEY:



Leaf Care: Leaves create nutrient-rich mulch for your trees and garden beds...if you must blow, keep it to a minimum and choose an electric/battery blower rather than gas-powered.

- Blow leaves only during spring / fall cleanup.
- Rake leaves first, then do minimal blowing.
- Accept a few leaves on the lawn—they'll decompose during the winter and enrich your soil, which benefits your lawn.
- Use only an electric/battery blower to remove excess leaves.
- Collect excess leaves in bins or paper bags or for curbside collection:
- Mulch leaves into the grass with an electric/battery mower. (You can use the grass mulching blade on your lawn mower or use a blade specifically designed for leaf mulching).
- Leave some leaves in borders/under trees and shrubbery to decompose or mulch them using an electric/battery mower.
- Collect excess leaves in a bag, pile, or container; use later for mulch or to support your compost bin.

Bed Care: Mulched beds retain moisture, create habitat, suppress weeds, prevent erosion.

- Mulch flower and shrub beds with shredded mulch varieties. Use only non-dyed options.
- Mulch using wood chips (wood chips are larger pieces compared to shredded varieties).
- Mulch beds using mulched leaves from your trees.
- Leave the leaves in your beds untouched to winter over (through the last freeze date in spring) to support pollinators.
- Leave a thin layer of leaves along with some mulched leaves to your beds year round.
- Expand your beds to reduce your lawn.

Grass Care (Mowing / Edging): If a grass lawn is part of your plan, keep it on the long side and allow grass clippings to naturally fertilize it. Choose an electric/battery mower and edger rather than gas-operated ones.

- Mow grass at heights of 2.5 – 3.5 inches. Mow no more than 1/3 of the blade height in a single mow.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to return nutrients to the soil. If preferred, use a mulching blade to shred clippings more finely.
- Avoid blowing or sweeping clippings from walkways/driveways into the streets in order to prevent clogged storm drains.
- Use an electric/battery mower and trimmer.
- Transition to grasses that need minimal mowing such as fescue or bentgrass.
- Clean up lawn edges with a manual scissor/trimmer.
- No mow (where permitted).

Homeowner's Sustainable Yard Checklist

How "Green" can you make your yard maintenance practices?

KEY:



Plants: Select native plants tailored to your sun/ shade, climate and habitat.

- Remove non-native, invasive plants. Follow NJ Invasive Species Strike Team guidance.
- Add more plants that are host plants for butterflies, such as milkweed.
- Plant drought-tolerant species.
- Plant companion plants as a natural pest management strategy.
- Leave flower heads and branches for pollinator habitat, bird food, and to permit self sowing.
- Learn what "weeds" in your yard may be foraged (for example, Purslane, Dandelions, Wild Onions).

Compost: All your yard waste and veggie/fruit food waste to create your own compost.

- Create a compost bin.
- Put excess leaves and food waste in your compost bin.
- Use homemade compost in your flower / veggie gardens.

Water: Water only when needed and never in the height of the day; explore ways you can capture and reuse stormwater.

- Water beds and lawn in early morning or late afternoon.
- Water beds only when needed (i.e. not after a rainstorm).
- Install drip irrigation instead of a sprinkler system.
- Install a rain barrel to capture stormwater (note: not for watering edible plants).
- Install a rain garden or other appropriate green infrastructure.

Pest and Weed Control: Avoid chemical pesticides / herbicides and opt for natural solutions.

- Prevent mosquito breeding: Eliminate standing water.
- Use corn gluten as a pre-emergent herbicide for weed prevention (apply early April).
- Fertilize with organic materials (such as compost), and don't use synthetic chemicals.
- Use plant combinations in vegetable gardens that naturally limit pests (i.e. basil with tomatoes).
- Manage pests with biological controls (i.e. botanical oils, neem oil).

Other: How else can you make your property even more green?

- Fertilize only during approved months (March 1 – November 14).
- Don't look for perfection in a lawn; accept some leaves and weeds.
- Don't create "mulch volcanoes" around trees.
- Plant native trees, especially red maples, sugar maples and multiple oak varieties.
- Create "soft landings" by planting diverse native species under native trees —providing shelter and habitat for one or more life cycle stages of butterflies, moths, and other beneficial insects.
- Reduce your lawn: Replace it with native shrubs and pollinator plants.
- Replace your paved driveway or hardscaped patio with pervious pavement or porous material.

©Advocates for Transforming Landscape Practices—New Jersey (ATL–NJ) and Madison Environmental Commission

