

# 10 Tips for an Environmentally Friendly Yard

## 1. Go Green With Your Lawn

A super-green, lush carpet of grass that's the envy of your neighbors might sound appealing at first thought. But in reality, maintaining such a lawn can cause big water quality problems. Fertilizers and pesticides applied in excess are washed into rivers, streams, and wetlands, so limiting their use can make a big difference. Even better, convert manicured lawns to natural meadow, beds of native perennials, shrubs, or forest. Here are three quick tips for a great, green lawn:

**a. Kill Insects with Kindness** - Or at least keep them away with natural deterrents. A list of non-chemical, natural insect repellents is available at: [www.eartheasy.com/live\\_natpest\\_control.htm](http://www.eartheasy.com/live_natpest_control.htm)

**b. Fight Weeds with Eco-Friendly Herbicides** - Try Deadeye (a vinegar-based formula) and WOW (nitrogen fertilizer) made from corn gluten. You can also pour boiling water or white vinegar on smaller weeds, like ones in walkway cracks.

**c. Go Native** - When landscaping your property, use native species (plants indigenous to Massachusetts) whenever possible. They require less water than grass does, because they have deeper roots and can store more water. Also, many of these species provide food and cover for local wildlife, providing a sanctuary from suburban sprawl. A list of approved plants is available on the Town of Spencer's website. For more information, see: [www.greenscapes.org](http://www.greenscapes.org) and [www.massnativeplants.org](http://www.massnativeplants.org).



## 2. Don't Let Those Creatures Go (info about invasive animals and plants)

Although exotic animals can be great pets, and ornamental plants can make beautiful decorations, many of these species are invasive. In fact, some of the same characteristics that make these species desirable, like hardiness and rapid growth, are the same characteristics that allow them to out-compete native plants and animals in the wild. So never release aquarium pets or bait into the water. Also, use native plants and animals in water gardens, since predators like the great blue heron often carry water-garden residents to neighboring habitats.

## 3. Plant a Rain Garden

Locate it in a natural low spot where it can intercept runoff from streets, driveways and walkways. Keep it at least 15 feet away from building foundations.

## 4. Compost yard waste

A lot of people think that because grass clippings, brush, and other yard waste are 'natural', it is okay to dump huge piles of them in the woods or wetlands. Dumped yard waste actually destroys the underlying vegetation and wildlife habitat, prohibiting new trees and shrubs from growing. Leaf dumping near water

bodies often results in flooding problems upstream. Roadside ditches, used to remove road runoff, can get clogged from leaves dumped by residents and landscapers.

### 5. Scoop the Poop

It's a dirty job, but if you don't do it, you're directly contributing to local water quality problems. Pet waste contains parasites that can cause human (and pet) health problems and can be harmful to our wetlands and streams. Please pick up after your pet and never throw pet waste into a storm drain or waterway.



### 6. Don't be a Drip

Oil, gasoline, and antifreeze from cars, trucks, lawnmowers, and boats are highly toxic to wildlife. If you notice a leak, fix it immediately to keep these toxins from polluting our waterways.

### 7. Drain Swimming Pools Wisely

Never drain a pool or a hot tub directly into a body of water. The best option is to discharge chlorinated water over landscaping using the following steps: (1) shut off the chlorination system or stop adding chlorine one week before draining pool water; (2) make sure the pH level is between 6.5 and 8.5, the normal pH range of surface and ground waters; (3) Drain pool water where it will not flow directly into a street, gutter, wetland, or onto someone else's property.

### 8. Deadwood is Good Wood

Deadwood is an essential component of forests and wetlands. It provides habitat for a myriad of organisms. Forest health revolves completely around decomposing wood and leaves. Whether a standing oak that is riddled with woodpecker holes or a fallen willow that has created a snag in a small brook, deadwood fosters forest life. Think twice before you "clean up" or clear cut your forest.

### 9. Wetlands are Wonderful

Wetlands are valuable because they reduce flooding, provide wildlife habitat, help recharge aquifers, and filter polluted water. Yet wetlands may not be wet all the time. Low areas that flood in the spring may also be wetlands. All kinds of wetlands are protected by the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act. Over 25% of Spencer falls under wetland regulations, so your property may, too. Always contact your local conservation commission before you consider working near wetlands and waterways.

### 10. Protect Wetlands by Planting a Vegetative Barrier Around Them.

If you live on the banks of a stream or adjacent to a wetland, a vegetative buffer is particularly important to prevent runoff from washing pollution directly into these waters. A native vegetative buffer zone will help maintain water quality, recreational resources, wildlife habitat, and property value.



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