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The Green Girl: Blades of glory: Make your 'green' grass grow

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Here's a shock: The green, green grass of home may be the biggest source of pollution in your home, according to *E/The Environment Magazine*.

All the herbicides and pesticides we dump on our lawns to make them green and bug-free are tracked into our homes. In addition, they leach into our water supply, ultimately harming us and the environment.



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becoming a vicious cycle.

Here's the good news: By working with instead of against nature, you can reduce your yard's toxic toll.

Chemical pesticides work temporarily to get rid of insects. Unfortunately, these chemical killers don't know the difference between a "good" bug and a "bad" bug. Most of us have both kinds in our yards. We need the good bugs, along with birds, to help keep the bad ones in check. If we kill the predators along with the prey, a new infestation means another chemical application,

One way to reduce the need for pesticides is to "plant native." A native landscape welcomes both insect-eating and plant-eating insects, along with birds and lizards to create a natural balance. And, if you have a serious insect problem, consider natural alternatives such as a spray of garlic mixed in water or a mild soap-and-water solution.

To keep our lawns green and weed-free, most of us dump hundreds of pounds of fertilizer and herbicide on our lawns each year. These chemicals, however, can harm the natural balance of the soil and kill earthworms, which are the earth's natural aeration system.

What can you do instead? Follow these simple rules provided by the Environmental Protection Agency's Healthy Lawn, Healthy Environment program:

- **Mow high, mow often and make sure your blades are sharp!** According to the Department of Environmental Protection, keeping your grass at 2 to 3 inches allows each blade to take in an optimal amount of sunlight for a thicker blade and deeper, healthier root system. This in turn allows the soil to retain moisture longer and helps your yard better tolerate insect damage and fight disease.
- **Fertilize with organic compost, which can be bought at your local garden center, or you can make your own.** Home Depot sells composting bins as well as Terracycle fertilizer. Terracycle not only has created a natural non-toxic means of gardening, but all of its products are contained in reused plastic soda and milk jugs to reduce the human footprint. Leaving grass clippings on your lawn after mowing can give a continual boost of nutrients.
- **Aerate your lawn!** Even if your yard has a healthy population of earthworms, slipping on a pair of aeration sandals equipped with pins on the bottom, helps water and nutrients reach the roots of your grass.
- **Water deeply but not too often to help plants develop healthy and deep root systems.** Frequent short watering cycles promote shallow roots, making the lawn less able to find moisture during droughts.

By using these natural ways to care for your lawn, you will find the grass will always be greener in your yard.

Pine Jog does not endorse the products or companies listed. References are for information only.

Supplemented by staff members of Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, West Palm Beach, in association with Florida Atlantic University. For more information, go to www.pinejog.fau.edu.

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