



Take Action! Minimize Lawn

Suggested below are a number of actions you can take to reduce the size of your lawn and to naturally maintain the lawn you keep. Check off each as you complete it or incorporate it into your land-care routines. Set a target date for accomplishing all of the recommended activities. Explore the Resources and Links we've provided for further guidance.

- 1. DECIDE** where to start. Look at the map you've created and block out areas of lawn you'd like to eliminate. Look at your habitat plan and determine what will replace the lawn once it has been removed so that you'll beat out resurgent weeds. Consider the following ideas.
 - Extend** the borders of existing gardens, such as foundation beds or beds along the stretch of a walkway or driveway.
 - Plant** shade trees alongside your driveway, a hedgerow along the perimeter of your property, a multi-level vegetation edge in a back corner, low-growing native shrubs and groundcovers on a steep slope.
 - Establish** a butterfly/hummingbird garden.
 - Create** a pond or other water feature
 - Build** a composting area.
 - Stop** mowing and let the lawn grow into a meadow. (You'll have to mow once or twice a year to prevent trees and shrubs from growing.) You can eventually add native grasses and wildflowers to the mix.

- 2. REMOVE** the grass. Dig up the turf with a tiller or spade, and repeat the process at least once more the following week to discourage grass and weed seed sprouts. You can also kill the vegetation by blocking out the light with a covering of newspapers, cardboard, or an old rug. Another alternative is to add several inches of compost atop a heavy mulch layer and then plant with native groundcovers.

- 3. REPLACE** the removed sod with native plants appropriate to the site. Consider restoring it to the natural habitat type that occurred on your property before it was developed. You can re-create beneficial habitat for birds and other wildlife by mimicking the structure, patterns, and colors found in nature. For instance, plant in clusters and in vertical layers, from herbaceous groundcovers to tree canopies.

- 4. TAKE** it easy. The transformation from lawn to wildlife habitat takes time. Tackle only as much as you can, remembering that removal must be paired with replacement.
- 5. PRACTICE** natural lawn care. If you do keep a section of lawn, consider these maintenance tips.
- Re-plant** the lawn with native grasses, which are better suited to your climate conditions and thus require less of everything your nonnative turf needed, such as water, fertilizer, and mowing.
 - Keep** your grass mowed to a height of 3 to 3 1/2 inches high; this will shade out competing weeds and retain moisture.
 - Leave** grass clippings on the lawn — the nitrogen provides free fertilizer.
 - Encourage** the grass to develop a deep root system by watering longer but less frequently, and always in the morning. Deeper roots will enable the grass to better survive dry spells.
 - Test** the soil for its pH and nutrient content. Amend and feed the soil as necessary. Healthy soil equals healthy lawn. If necessary, use a slow-release organic fertilizer, such as compost, aged manure, seaweed, or rock.
 - Welcome** diversity. Nature abhors a monoculture; perhaps that's why it is so difficult to maintain a carpet of grass. Look at your lawn as a changing canvas; enjoy the surprises that pop up. Though the ideal is to cultivate native grasses and wildflowers, some non-natives can be tolerated and can even be beneficial. For instance, clover actually adds nitrogen to the soil.
 - Know** your weeds. They tell you different things about your lawn, such as whether the soil drains poorly or is low in nutrients.
- 6. ELIMINATE** pesticides from your lawn. Do not use pesticides on lawns or for other purely aesthetic purposes. Remember, that your children and pets as well as birds and wildlife will be in direct contact with whatever is applied to the backyard.

RESOURCES/LINKS

Audubon magazine: "Dawn of a New Lawn"

<http://magazine.audubon.org/backyard/backyard0105.html>

Florida Native Plants

Reasons for reducing lawn size

http://www.floridanativeplants.com/articles/lawn_gone1.shtml#art_top

Montgomery County Maryland Dept. of Environmental Protection

How to shrink the lawn

<http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/mc/services/dep/greenman/shrunk.htm>

Minnesota Office of Environmental Assistance

How to grow a healthy lawn

<http://www.moea.state.mn.us/campaign/garden/>

The New York Times

Organic methods for lawns

http://ipm.osu.edu/trans/023_161.htm