

## *Five easy steps to a chemical-free lawn*

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If lawns were classified as a crop, they would constitute the fifth largest crop in this country, following corn, soybeans, wheat and hay. Per year, Americans apply more than 80 million pounds of chemical products to lawns and gardens. Pesticides are poisonous and are not necessary for a beautiful lawn.

Pesticides and weed killers have been associated with birth defects, cancer, Parkinson's disease, male infertility and immune disorders. Children are particularly vulnerable to the toxicity of pesticides. Even when these chemicals are applied outdoors, they come inside via shoes, paws and air currents. Once indoors, they linger for months. Pesticides contaminate water supplies and harm birds, butterflies and other creatures. They interfere with natural pest control.

Here are five easy tips to a beautiful, chemical-free lawn:

**Tip One:** Allow your grass to grow taller. The longer the blade, the deeper the roots, the stronger the grass! Strong grass is more resilient against weeds, disease and drought. Let your lawn do the work of choking out those weeds.

**Tip Two:** Lawns only need one inch of rain a week. During dry spells, let your lawn enter a period of natural dormancy and cut back on mowing. Your beautiful chemical-free green lawn will return when the rain does.

**Tip Three:** Leave grass clippings where they fall. Grass clippings can supply up to 50% of the nitrogen needed by a lawn. They naturally fertilize and add valuable nutrients to the soil. Also people should get a soil test to determine if pH is proper and to identify any nutrient deficiencies. Fall fertilizing to correct for missing nutrients is best.

**Tip Four:** Remove weeds by hand with a paring knife. You can also try corn gluten to stop the spread of broadleaf weeds – it won't kill them, but will stop new ones from germinating.

**Tip Five:** Reduce the size of your lawn by letting some of it turn to meadow. Meadows are more diverse and so better support natural predators of pests. Also, expand your gardens or xeriscape – a water wise garden – more paths, patios, flower beds, ground covers (including meadow) can all replace lawn.

Make the move to a non-toxic, less costly yet still beautiful lawn that you can feel good about. Don't stress about having the perfect lawn - learn to tolerate a few weeds. For more information, visit [www.cetonline.org](http://www.cetonline.org).