

My Money



How to Spend Less on Lawn Maintenance

By [MONEY CRASHERS](#)

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With winter officially over, many of us are eying our dead, brown lawns, hoping to revive them back to their green and lush state. But if your first step in lawn care is to stop by your local hardware store for an expensive fertilizer and a weed control mixture, think again.

These chemical additives wreak havoc on the environment, negatively impacting the local watershed and wildlife. The good news is that you can still have a picture-perfect lawn without all those damaging chemicals. Here are four natural, eco-friendly ways to care for your lawn that can actually save you money.

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1. Fertilize Naturally

Most of us need to fertilize in the early spring. Plants are hungry from their winter dormancy, and adding fertilizer is the best way to jump start their growth and get your lawn off to a great start. But fertilizer doesn't have to mean "chemical." If you've been [vermicomposting](#) all winter, now is the best time to use your compost tea to fertilize your lawn. I use compost tea in my own lawn every spring and it works wonders. The bonus? It's free and you help [reduce food waste](#) in your home as well. If you haven't been composting, or aren't able to, you can still buy prepackaged "worm tea" at major stores like Home Depot.

2. Mow Less

Most people mow their lawns way too often—and cut the blades too short. Your mower's blades should be cutting the grass at three inches or higher. Anything shorter than that can actually encourage weeds on your lawn, since short grass exposes the sunlight to the soil and can jump start dormant seeds. The less you mow, the less pollution you're putting into the atmosphere. According to the [EPA](#), a traditional gas-powered mower emits more pollution than 43 new cars, each being driven 12,000 miles.

Why are they so bad? Because such small engines don't have emission standards like cars do. Mowing less also means you're using less gas, and with [gas prices rising](#) these days, we could all benefit from buying that commodity less. The EPA estimates that each year, we spill more than 17 million gallons of fuel, just refilling our lawn equipment. That's more than what the Exxon Valdez dumped on Alaska's coast. You could also think about switching to an electric lawn mower or a push reel mower. Push reel mowers are 100 percent eco-friendly; they're quiet, they don't require gas, they don't emit pollution, and they give you more exercise.

[In Pictures: [12 Money Mistakes Almost Everyone Makes](#)]

3. Don't Kill "Weeds"

Many people want lawns that resemble a golf course. But this means that common "weeds", like clover and dandelion, must be killed off immediately before they spoil the effect. The

problem is that chemical weed killers are extremely hazardous to the environment, as well as our health. Plus, weeds like clover add beneficial nitrogen to the soil (which further helps improve the health of your grass). Clover and dandelion also provide honeybees with a much-needed food source. And if you're really adventurous, there are many [health benefits to eating dandelions](#).

Don't believe me? Check out some of these [dandelion greens recipes](#)—they're healthy and taste great. Why not let those weeds grow out this year? Having a natural looking lawn can be even prettier than a perfect patch of pristine grass. And, you'll save yourself the hassle and stress of trying to maintain it all summer long.

4. Use Rainwater

According to the EPA, most people over-water their lawns. This not only wastes water, but it also costs you money. Instead of hooking that hose up to your house, invest in a rain barrel or two, and use Mother Nature's water (for free). I use two rain barrels at my house, and I never have to use "bought" city water to give my garden a drink. The practice of transforming your lawn so it doesn't depend on imported water is called [xeriscape landscaping](#). And with the droughts that many cities and states go through every summer and fall, xeriscaping is a smart—and cost-effective—way to design your yard.

Final Thoughts

Using the above eco-friendly techniques to care for your lawn will make a big difference to the environment and your wallet, especially if you get rid of major polluters and gas guzzlers like your lawn mower. Plus, letting your yard grow more naturally will free up many of your afternoons so you can do something fun instead—like take a nap in your hammock! What are some of the eco-friendly things you're doing to prepare your lawn for the spring and summer?

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