Green Tips Summer 2022

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People are exposed to low levels of pesticides every day. Although research is ongoing as to the level of harm humans face, it is well known that these low levels are altering the environment around us, killing good bugs and weeds along with the ones we may have targeted with poison, changing the ecology around us in ways we cannot appreciate.

As physicians and medical care providers it is our job to prevent or minimize risk where possible. Many of us have small green spaces around our offices, and many are lucky enough to have green spaces around our homes. We have an opportunity to maintain health in these spaces, by avoiding pesticides and encouraging native plants.

This *Green Tips* article provides a list of options to make sure your workplace and home outdoor spaces are healthy and safe. The references at the end (e.g. Rutgers) provide lots of great resources.

Best practice for lawn care. Keep grass 3 inches or taller, leave the clippings. This helps build healthy soil and decreases weed growth.

Limit the space you must mow. Plant native bushes and perennials. These will be lovely and fun to look at year after year. They will need little care and will provide food and shelter for birds, bugs, and little critters that are essential to our environment in NJ.

Use organic fertilizers over synthetic ones. Synthetic fertilizers can reduce the quality of soil over time, so choose organic fertilizers instead. Over time, using organic fertilizers will improve the quality of your soil and make the overall green space a healthier place to enjoy. Refer to "More Resources" to find out which organic fertilizer is right for you.

Do not use pesticides or herbicides. Pesticides and herbicides greatly harm the environment. Avoid them at all costs. On a local level, naturally occurring greens provide reassurance that no harmful chemicals will enter your workspace or harm those enjoying the greenery.

Use permeable paving to avoid runoff. A permeable paving provides an outlet for water to soak into your space and prevent runoff. Everything from fertilizer to pet waste becomes pollution once it gets into rainwater runoff. Using permeable paving will limit contamination and help keep local water sources clear and pristine.

Follow the 2011 NJ Fertilizer Law. This law prohibits applying fertilizer before March 1st or after November 15th during a given calendar year. You may not need a fertilizer in the first place. Test your soil before applying it. Rutgers conducts soil testing (see "More Resources").

Avoid plants that commonly trigger allergies. It wouldn't be fun to work with itchy eyes or constant sneezing. Do your coworkers, patients and yourself a favor and avoid plants that are known to produce allergens, such as ficus and chrysanthemum.

Enjoy the space. Research has shown that green spaces have mental health benefits, reduce stress, and improve air quality. They can help us keep calm and provide a respite from the daily bustles of life. Take care of your green space, and it will take care of you.

Talk to your patients about your plans and successes with your green spaces. Maybe it will inspire them to build one for themselves.

More Resources:

a. Healthier Lawns, Safer Play, Cleaner Water by the Summit Environmental Commission: https://www.cityofsummit.org/DocumentCenter/View/1770/Lawn-Care-Brochure-PDF
b. Rutgers Climate Institute: https://climatechange.rutgers.edu/events/all-climate-events/icalrepeat.detail/2021/04/12/6403/-/webinar-earth-day-every-day-from-rain-gardens-to-rain-barrels-protecting-watersheds-at-home April 2021
c. Rutgers on Organic Lawn Care: https://njaes.rutgers.edu/organiclandcare/
d. Lawn Care without Pesticides by Cornell University: https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/43857/lawn-care-no-pesticides-NYSIPM.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
e. Rutgers Soil Testing: https://njaes.rutgers.edu/soil-testing-lab/
f. EPA on Nutrient Pollution: https://www.epa.gov/nutrientpollution
g. CDC on Benefits of Green Spaces: https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/pdf/20_0204.pdf
h. Rutgers on Incorporating Native Plants: https://njaes.rutgers.edu/fs1140/
i. List of Organic Fertilizers: https://www.epicgardening.com/organic-fertilizers/
j. CDC on Pesticides: https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/multimedia/infographics/pesticide_exposure.html
k. Renkl, Margaret. One Way to Do More for the Environment: Do Less With Your Yard. New York Times May 16 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/opinion/climate-change-gardening-biodiversity.html
l. Garden Club of America. The Great Healthy Yard Project – One Simple Thing We Can All Do to Give Our Children a Healthy Future. http://tghyp.com/