



Yard Work and Outdoor Cleaning

Spring cleaning wouldn't be complete without venturing into the yard to clear away unwanted leaves, weeds and debris that have collected under the winter's snow. Depending on the size of your lawn, this task may take a few minutes or a few days. Yet, if you want to enter the spring season with a fresh, new start, there are several environmentally-friendly rules of thumb to consider.

Leaf Blower

Have leaves collected around your lawn and under your shrubs? Don't grab a leaf blower. Go find a rake. Here's why:

- A gas-powered leaf-blower emits as much tailpipe emissions during one hour of use as an automobile traveling across 350 miles. Bear in mind, however, that while a car spreads its air pollution over a wide area, the leaf blower will concentrate its emissions in your yard.
- Unlike rakes, leaf blowers cause small particles like dirt, pesticides and animal droppings to disperse into the air, which can affect one's respiratory system. Furthermore, the force of a leaf blower's dry air upon the ground can dehydrate your soil, leading to irreversible topsoil erosion.
- Raking is more aerobically beneficial than blowing leaves. You can burn 100 to 200 calories within a half hour.

Grass not Gas

Although gasoline-powered lawn equipment may not use much fuel, they emit a disproportionate amount of air pollution. For example, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a 5-horsepower lawnmower can produce more emissions than a 200-horsepower car. A gasoline-powered chainsaw run for an hour emits the equivalent in air pollution of driving 200 miles.

So, what is a lawn owner to do? The conscious consumer has several options when purchasing lawn care equipment:

- For both a discount in price and decrease in environmental harm, you can buy a manual push lawn mower.
- If your property is too large to rely on a manual design, there are electric models, some of which do not need to be plugged into an electrical source. You can find these models at large home and garden stores like Home Depot or Lowe's.
- If you currently own a gas-powered mower and cannot afford to purchase a new device, be sure to keep your mower's blades sharp and well-tuned to produce the most efficient cutting.
- To reduce the amount of watering your lawn requires, adjust the height of your blades so that your lawn is shorn to no less than 3 inches. This height is optimal for retaining the right amount of water.
- Regardless of your mowing device, another means to reduce the negative environmental effects of mowing your property is to reduce the area that you need to mow. Incorporating more trees, shrubs and flowerbeds, while minimizing the amount of lawn that must be cut, simultaneously adds shade and character to your landscape.
- When incorporating any new plant life into your property, strongly consider plants native to your region. These species add the dual benefit of requiring less irrigation and less need for fertilizers since they are well adapted to both the climate and complementary species of your habitat.

Keep More than Pests Aside

When it is necessary to apply any chemicals to your property, bear in mind that a little bit goes a long way. Seventy million pounds of pesticide are applied to home lawns annually. In fact, though agriculture accounts for the lion's share of pesticide use, on a per acre basis homeowners use almost 10 times more pesticides than farmers do, accounting for 8% of all pesticide application. This residential use of pesticides could more directly impact human health since people are in closer contact with common yard pesticides.

Pesticides are intended to kill living things. If used too liberally, they can harm more than their intended victims. For example, rain can wash excess pesticide into streams where its concentrated chemicals can kill fish or contaminate human water supplies. Meanwhile, excessive application of chemical fertilizers harms your lawn, depleting the soil of its organic material. By killing the microorganisms that abound in this part of the soil, fertilizers make your lawn more susceptible to disease.

Tip: Got Ants?

For inside your house only, sprinkle red chili, paprika, or dried peppermint where ants enter.