

Becoming Better Earth Care Stewards In Virginia: Reconsidering Lawn Care

Nearly every church in our presbytery and for that matter the whole country, confronts the same balancing act that homeowners face: How can we create an attractive landscape and also be responsible stewards of our environment? In this piece the NCP Earth Care Network would like to offer a couple of recommendations – reduce the size of our lawns and reduce the amount of herbicides, fertilizers, and pesticides that we apply to them.

Reduce our lawns

Dan Zak of *The Washington Post* summarized the issue:

“We are still, largely, lawn people. The biggest irrigated crop, by area, in the United States? Not corn, or soybean, but lawn. Unproductive, ornamental lawn: around 40 million acres of it, or 2 percent of the land area of the Lower 48, according to multiple estimates cited by Garik Gutman, program manager for NASA’s Land-Cover/Land-Use Change Program.

“Forty million acres: The entire state of Georgia couldn’t contain America’s total lawnage. And we pour 9 billion gallons of water on landscaping every day, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Meanwhile the Southwest United States is enduring a [megadrought](#); the past two decades constitute its driest period since the year 800. California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a drought state of emergency in October. In a world thirsty for water, lawns are a sneaky siphon.”

Dan Zak, “There’s a Water Crisis, so why do we still have lawns?” *The Washington Post*, 8/24/2022 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/08/24/lawns-and-replacement/>)

We can reduce the size of our lawns and still have attractive grounds by opting for native plants. This will support native insects, birds, and other animals. So, what native plants might you consider? See this brochure from Fairfax County.

<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/soil-water-conservation/native-plants>

Reducing the amount of lawn chemicals

For those congregations located in Virginia, the state Department of Conservation and Recreation has established what it calls its “Green and Clean” program. The program is designed to encourage lawn care companies to reduce their use of chemicals on our lawns. Here is how the state describes the program’s purpose:

“The Green & Clean initiative is an effort to help meet water quality standards set forth by the federal Clean Water Act and the state. Many of Virginia’s water bodies are unhealthy

and do not meet these standards. Voluntary actions from [lawn care] businesses, such as those that are a part of this initiative, can help protect the environment and improve degraded areas without creating a need for new regulations.

<https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil-and-water/wqagree#:~:text=The%20Green%20%26%20Clean%20initiative%20is,do%20not%20meet%20these%20standards.>

Companies that want to be part of the program must abide by the state's standards. The good news is that for 2023, five companies in northern Virginia have signed onto the program. The NCP Earth Care network strongly encourages congregations seeking a northern Virginia lawn care service to consider using one of these companies. Here is a listing of the companies.

Brandon Rushing Lawn & Garden Care

7805 Cinder Bed Rd, Lorton, VA 22079
703-339-0067

Del Ray Landscapes

PO Box 31497, Alexandria, VA 22310
703-298-0146

NexGreen LLC

5415 Yukon Court, Suite E, Frederick, MD 21703
301-712-9999

NuLeaf Lawn Care

8354 E Terminal Rd., Lorton, VA 22079
703-989-9405

Oaktree Property Care

4439 Forest Hill Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030
703-862-8733