



# National Capital Presbytery Earth Care Network

# BECOMING BETTER EARTH CARE STEWARDS



## 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.





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? [Fairfax County](#) has some great ideas!

## 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.”

Companies that want to be part of the program must abide by the state’s standards.

## TIPS FOR MANAGING LAWNS ORGANICALLY

- Mow grass high (keep at least 3” tall)
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to recycle nutrients
- Only water during dry spells
- Add materials, such as compost, to support healthy soil biology
- Replace some lawn with native plants
- Overseed every fall for a dense lawn, and aerate compact soils
- Get help from an experienced organic lawn care provider
- Keep mower blades sharp
- Use an electric or manual mower for reduced emissions and noise, and for energy efficiency
- Use a mulching mower
- Mulch leaves that fall on the lawn, rather than removing them

