

AN ALTERNATIVE: HARNESSING NATURAL PROCESSES

The natural amenities that originally drew residents to some areas – clean waters and quality woodlands – were often compromised as people sought to embrace them. However, these qualities can be restored by reintroducing natural processes into lawn and garden care.

The natural cycle

Consider what happens in the forest environment. A layer of fallen leaves helps reduce erosion by protecting soil from the impact of falling raindrops.



That's why, even after a heavy rain, clear water is found in undisturbed woodland streams. Natural grasslands protect water quality in much the same way.

Leaves and grassy vegetation are naturally decomposed by soil organisms, which return nutrients to the soil. The nutrients needed by plants are then taken up by roots to produce new growth year after year in a very efficient recycling process. Under these conditions, plants grow without the need for additional fertilizers. Decaying vegetation also forms an insulating layer of mulch and adds organic matter which reduces daily temperature fluctuations and increases the soil's capacity to hold moisture.

Imitate nature through planning and action

We can't expect that a natural ecosystem can be duplicated in the urban environment; but by taking advantage of natural processes, yard care can generally be made more efficient and less problematic for lakes and streams.

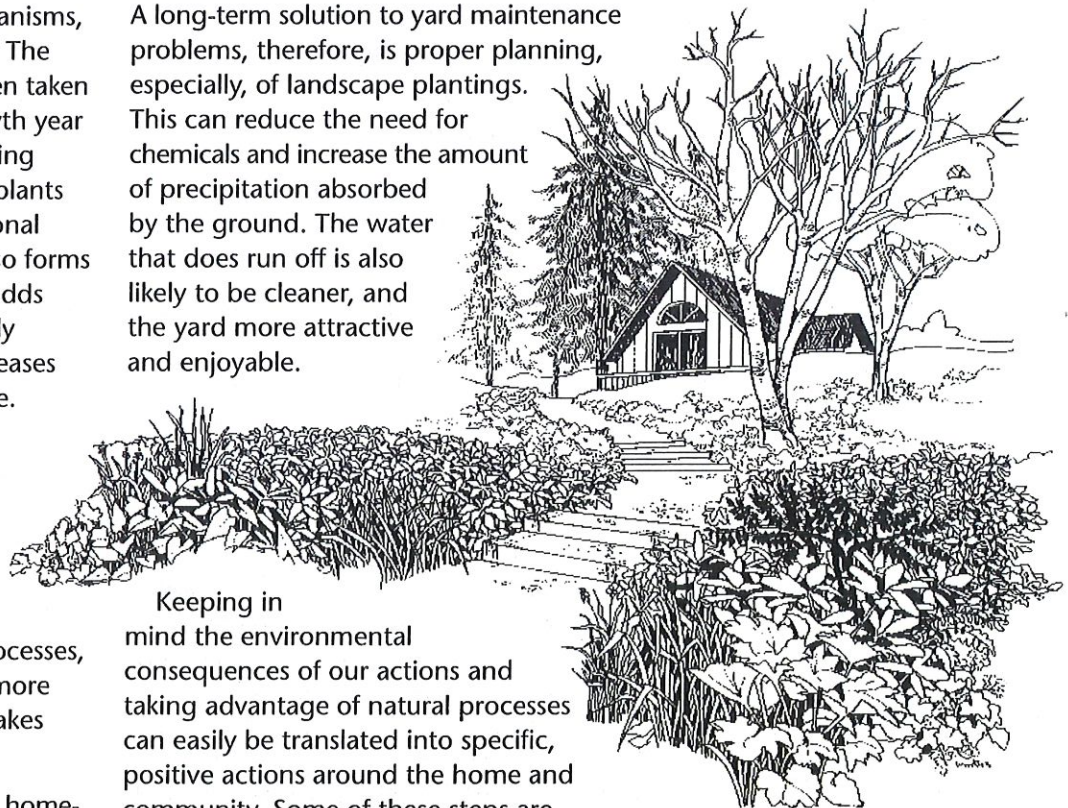
What works for nature can work for homeowners. By properly mowing, mulching,

and composting leaves and grass clippings, the normal amount of fertilizing, watering, and weeding can often be reduced. If grass clippings are allowed to remain on lawns instead of being raked or bagged, they will produce benefits from natural recycling. Even pests become less of a problem if more "natural diversity" in plantings is used – as opposed to typical urban uniformity – so that susceptible plants are grown farther apart.

If you have natural or "wild" areas on your property, think twice before deciding to convert them to more formal landscaped areas. Natural landscapes often require less time and money to maintain than formal landscapes, and are usually the best at preventing water pollution from runoff. This is especially important for waterfront property.

A long-term solution to yard maintenance problems, therefore, is proper planning, especially, of landscape plantings. This can reduce the need for chemicals and increase the amount of precipitation absorbed by the ground. The water that does run off is also likely to be cleaner, and the yard more attractive and enjoyable.

Areas of natural landscaping can be a long-term solution to yard maintenance chores, and reduce the need for fertilizers and pesticides.



Keeping in mind the environmental consequences of our actions and taking advantage of natural processes can easily be translated into specific, positive actions around the home and community. Some of these steps are highlighted on the following pages.