

Your lawn is killing the environment – but there are alternatives | Opinion

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Mowing lawns. Photo by Jim Tatum.

Lawns we don't need, they bring poisons and pollutants to our water. If you must have green, plant ground cover such as some of the dozens of types of jasmine, (asiatic, snow-in-summer, or summerset-sunset all do well in Florida) that never need fertilizers nor pesticides. Urban fertilizer has a strong lobby, promoted even by our flagship university. Summer is the absolute worst time to put anything toxic on the ground, as frequent showers will wash it off your lawn and into our wastewater.

Read the entire article here in TCPalm.

Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

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*– A river is like a life: once taken,
it cannot be brought back © Jim Tatum*

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To feed our obsession for sod and lawn grass, gas-sucking lawn mowers were first manufactured around 1902. Riding lawn mowers shortly followed in 1922. So like golf carts, you didn't even have to walk!

People and businesses even hire professionals, spending \$45 billion yearly on lawn care.

Lawn care adds greatly to carbon emissions as 54 million Americans use 800 million gallons of gas mowing their lawns. Moreover, just in filling up mowers, 17 million gallons of gas are spilled yearly, more than the Exxon Valdez spill.

The Environmental Protection Agency says one gasoline gallon produces 20 pounds of carbon dioxide. Blowers and mowers expel 41 billion pounds carbon dioxide yearly. A new gas-powered lawn mower produces the same volatile pollution as 11 new cars in one hour.

In 2005, American lawns covered 63,000 square miles, about the size of Texas. Lawns are the No. 1 U.S. irrigated crop, using

three times more water than corn. And we cannot even eat it!
What a waste!

In Florida, 64% of drinking water goes to irrigation (in summer, 88 percent). Our aquifers are being depleted. Only 1% of Earth's water is available for drinking.

This green desert of grass produces billions of gallons of contaminated water from 100 million pounds of pernicious lawn herbicides, insecticides, and fertilizers that go from the lawns into our canals, lagoon, and oceans that could be used for drinking and swimming!

We must stop poisoning ourselves with these lawn chemicals. Our health will greatly improve due to clean waters in our ditches, canals, lagoon, St. Sebastian River and ocean. More native trees and plants will also absorb carbon dioxide and produce more oxygen, thus increase time to live and postponing future climate disaster.

Insecticides target all insects and microorganisms that keep our soil naturally healthy. Four thousand pollinator species, including many bees, raise their young underground. About 90% of our insects are beneficial or benign.



Richard Baker is President of Pelican Island

Audubon (Photo: Richard Baker)

Herbicides also kill beneficial plants like clover, which enrich our soils and feed pollinators. After killing the natural nutrients, we then add fertilizers, which go into our lagoon causing algae blooms.

Finally, the current administration and EPA have reversed safeguards that monitored and reduced coal, oil, and methane pollution and waste. The progress we had made to protect our health and environment is being reversed: Clean Air Act (1970), Safe Drinking Water Act (1974), Migratory Bird Act (1918) to name a few.

Our health is endangered. Endangered species aren't protected, and vital habitats are deteriorating...

An asteroid eliminated the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Humans are now causing the a new extinction. New U.N. studies predict extinctions of one million plant & animal species in the next decades, including 314 U.S. bird species. Our birds are running out of fuel. In the last 50 years, we have lost almost 3 billion birds (29%) across the United States and Canada.

Only 3% to 5% of our Earth remains undisturbed. We have removed nearly 50% of our forests. Over 86% of the United States east of the Mississippi River is privately owned. Our natural areas are not large enough to sustain nature. When nature is ill, we are ill.

We can do something about this locally. Let's all have suburban home-grown "residential national parks" by planting our yards with native trees and plants for our survival.

Beautiful clean waters and Florida's natural environment are what brought us all here. Let's restore them – and save money and taxes.

*Richard Baker is president of the Pelican Island Audubon Society
in Indian River County.+*