

## Education is the Key to a Greener World

We live in a world striving to come to grips with the impact humanity has had on the planet, and we all have a role to play in sustainable living as homeowners, employees, and consumers. Governments, businesses, and municipal leaders know education is essential to ensuring people make informed environmental choices. When it comes to home lawn and garden care, the Greener World campaign aims to do its part.

Xeriscapes, wood chips, and synthetic turf are increasingly replacing lawns and gardens in many communities, but lawns are still a significant part of our landscape. Homeowners may choose to replace lawns for reasons of convenience, to eliminate maintenance, or out of personal landscape design preference. However, those who love their lawns may have good reasons for keeping them. Healthy turf produces an amazing amount of oxygen. A 50-by-50-foot area of turf creates enough oxygen every day for a family of four. Turfgrass acts as a natural air purifier by trapping and removing pollutants from the atmosphere, and as a filtration system, reducing run-off and erosion from heavy rains, and recharging our groundwater supplies. Perhaps most important in a world with rising temperatures, a lawn has the same cooling power as three or four air-conditioning units, without the energy costs, reducing the temperature around a home by 4°C to 8°C. On hot days, a lawn will

be up to 39°C cooler than synthetic turf or hard surfaces.

The key to realizing all of these environmental benefits is to ensure green space is cared for sustainably. That is the goal of the Greener World educational campaign for homeowners. Developed as part of Fertilizer Canada's urban nutrient stewardship commitment, the program strives to address misinformation and the lack of knowledge that can lead to confusion among homeowners caring for outdoor landscapes. Municipal staff, agronomists, and retailers often find themselves fielding questions from people who want to tend their residential landscape responsibly. The goal of the program is to educate homeowners about lawn and garden care best practices.

### Promoting Responsible Home Fertilizer Use

Launched in 2010 with a print and online campaign promoting responsible home fertilizer use, the program shares agronomic best practices by promoting the following four "rights" for home gardeners.

**Right source** – When choosing a fertilizer for your lawn, review your options by reading the label. The three numbers on the bag indicate the ratio of NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium), the three key nutrients needed for growing plants.

**Right rate** – Know the size of your lawn, buy only what you need, and follow the instructions on the bag. Use a quality lawn fertilizer spreader or handheld model to ensure even distribution.

**Right time** – Spring and fall are the best times to fertilize. Don't apply if heavy rain is expected or while the ground is still frozen.

**Right place** – Sweep any fertilizer that lands on sidewalks or driveways back onto the lawn where it can do its job, avoiding sewers and waterways.

Resources include engaging video clips and print materials all available for download and use by homeowners or municipalities.<sup>1</sup> The campaign has grown from a reach of 8.6 million people the first year, to more than 23 million in 2015 through stories online and in daily and community newspapers. Advertising has included outreach on Twitter and through municipal calendars in communities that include London, Newmarket, Brantford, Kingston, Windsor, and Waterloo.

### Fall Clean-Up Message

One of the most commonly asked questions about fertilizer is what homeowners should do with leftover product at the end of the growing season. This led to the development of Greener World's "Use It, Share It, Store It" message, shared through social and conventional media outreach in the fall.



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<sup>1</sup> See <GreenerWorld.ca>.



## Top 10 Benefits of Healthy Turf

Thick, healthy turf provides a lot more than nice looking green space!

10. Healthy turf acts as a water filtration system. Thick lawns with deeper roots absorb more water and reduce run-off.
9. Lawns hold soil particles in place, helping to avoid erosion from water and wind.
8. Grass acts as an air purifier by trapping and removing pollutants from the air that are then broken down by the root system, especially important in urban areas with more vehicles.
7. Healthy lawns, trees, and shrubs can cool the temperature around a home by 4°C to 8°C.
6. Lawns produce an amazing amount of oxygen. A 50-by-50-foot lawn releases enough oxygen for a family of four every day.
5. A thick, healthy, green lawn provides a soft outdoor space for people to rest, read, or picnic.
4. All grasses have the ability to go dormant when water intake is reduced, like during the driest parts of the summer, and while the ground is frozen throughout the winter. They return to health when it rains.
3. Healthy lawns are one of the safest surfaces for children to play on or for baby's first steps.
2. A healthy lawn has the same cooling power as three or four air-conditioning units, without the energy costs.
1. On hot days, your lawn will be up to 39°C cooler than synthetic turf or hard surfaces.

### Use it

Best practices for lawn and garden care advise feeding your lawn every other month beginning when the ground is no longer frozen and stopping with that important last application in the fall. Properly-fed turf is not only greener, it's thicker, better able to crowd out weeds, and can better withstand drought in the dog days of summer. Feeding helps turf produce a deeper root structure, capable of reaching deeply-stored sources of water underground. Fall nutrients provide food stores to keep turf healthy during the coldest weather and boost root growth to reach deeply stored moisture reserves.

### Share it

All living things need food to grow and thrive, including parks, community gardens, and commemorative green spaces. Leftover fertilizer can be shared at the end of the season with family, neighbours, friends, or a community group. Healthy green space makes a tremendous contribution to our environment. The healthier the plants are, the greater the contribution will be.

### Store it

Keep any leftover fertilizer sealed in its original container in a dry place for use next season. If moisture gets in,

lumping may occur, but that can usually be fixed by breaking up any fertilizer clumps before placing it in the spreader next spring.

### Educating Homeowners

Among the educational messages Greener World promotes is the fact that all grasses have the ability to go dormant in periods when water intake is reduced. This can happen in the driest parts of the summer, and while the ground is frozen throughout the winter. Grass turns brown as the plant focuses its energy on the roots. The Greener World program promotes awareness that it is best to let a lawn rest during periods of dormancy, knowing it will green up with fall or spring rains, and when the snow melts.

Municipalities have a significant role to play in educating homeowners about the environment; but, they should not be expected to do it alone. Retailers and product manufacturers share responsibility as they are often closest to the consumer. The Greener World campaign continues to evolve. Municipalities are invited to share their feedback with Fertilizer Canada and to adopt campaign materials as part of their education outreach, both online and direct to residents. *MWV*

## Beaver Problems?

Join us on **Thursday, April 21st at 1:00pm EST** for a unique webinar on managing beavers with non-lethal alternatives.

This one hour, in-depth webinar will look at the causes of beaver-related flooding and how to mitigate that risk, while protecting municipal infrastructure, the environment, and public interests.

To register go to: **TheFurBearers.com**

