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Summer – A Time to be Outside and Relax

Ah summer! What I like so much about summer are its sounds – kids playing catch on the lawn, the bullfrog with the huge croak in a nearby pond, the unique birdcalls that I'm trying to identify. However, one sound of summer can be quite annoying – the ear-piercing sound of lawn mowers firing up at the most inopportune times. This got me thinking about ways to reduce the noise by cutting down on mowing, and then my train of thought went to – well, if I have to mow, what's the most efficient way – and finally, I thought how can I save time, money and my hearing by not having to mow at all? So this e-news has a section devoted to mowing or, even better, avoiding it!

Debbie Cook, Editor



So I'd Rather Do Anything But Mow

Do you ever feel like this? The good news is that today many people are opting to let much of their property revert to a 'cultivated' natural setting – planting large areas with [native vegetation](#), which attracts birds

and butterflies, and also requires virtually no care. People are creating [water features](#), such as mini streams or tiny ponds that can recycle roof runoff, and are virtually indistinguishable from a natural ecosystem. And people are constructing hardscapes – patios and walkways – using [permeable pavers](#) that allow water to seep

through.

Well, I Do Want Some Grass

Most people want at least a little patch of green grass. However, beware because not all grasses are created equal for our region. Some require much less maintenance and water in our region than others. For example, a blend of [fescues](#) is much more drought-tolerant and easier to care for than the commonly-used bluegrass. Fescues tend to grow slowly, and they can stay green all year. There are a number of varieties, such as tall fescue, creeping red fescue and Chewings fescue, all with different traits. Blended together, these fescues can form a wonderful lawn that requires little watering, fertilizing and mowing! A good blend to consider is [Pearl's Premium](#).

Okay, So I Have to Do a Little Mowing

Who knew that there is an art to [mowing](#)? There really is! First of all, mowing height matters more than you would think. The most effective height to mow a lawn is 3" high, because grass at this height has been proven to shade out weeds. One study found that a lawn mowed at 1" high had 55% weeds, whereas a lawn mowed at 3" high only had 7% weeds. A quick gauge of 3" is the length of a credit card. (Grass mowed at 3" high is also very effective carbon sequester. A study showed that photosynthesis increased by 5760% from 1" high grass to 3" high grass.)

Mowing with a [sharp blade](#) is also essential, because a dull blade tears the grass, allowing mildew and disease to enter the plant. A good rule of thumb is to sharpen your mower blade after every ten hours of mowing time.

[Grass clippings](#) should be left on the lawn. This means you not only don't have to clean them up, but that you can actually save on purchasing fertilizer! The clippings decompose quickly and provide nitrogen and organic material to your soil.

Summer Yard Care Calendar

Here's a handy checklist to keep your Greenscape looking great through the summer! Follow the links to learn more about each recommendation.



- Water lawn if the [Walk Test](#) shows your lawn is thirsty, but only if no watering restrictions are in effect.
- Do the [Shovel Test](#) around July 4th and again in mid-August
- Conduct the mower blade [Thumb Test](#) and sharpen mower blade at least every 10 hours of mowing
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn for free fertilizer
- Treat [weeds](#) organically or pull them by hand
- Water your lawn with "[compost tea.](#)" (It's cheap and easy to make, plus it's totally natural, ph neutral, and it activates the beneficial microbes in the soil many times over)!



Featured Native Plant

[*Cornus sericea* 'Cardinal'](#) [Cardinal Red-Osier Dogwood](#)

Cardinal is a fast-growing, multi-stemmed, deciduous shrub with cherry red winter stems. Tiny white flowers appear in flat-topped clusters in late spring. Flowers give way to clusters of creamy white fruit in late summer. Fruit is very attractive to birds and is generally considered to have as much if not more ornamental interest than the flowers.

Dark green leaves turn an attractive red-purple in autumn.

Benefits:

- Host plant for spring azure butterfly
- Nutritious berries for a wide range of birds
- Provides good nesting sites for birds and protective cover for wildlife
- Tolerates a wide variety of conditions, including wet soils

- Bright red stems in winter: extremely winter hardy

Consider adding this or other native plants to your garden for a low maintenance landscape, and to attract birds, butterflies and wildlife to your yard. Ask for native plants at your local nurseries, or check out [American Beauties](#) – the native plant resource for the Greenscapes program.

Greenscapes in South Shore Schools

The Greenscapes program, led by the North and South Rivers Watershed Association, has just completed its 14th “Water All Around You” school program in ten South Shore communities. Several thousand fifth graders toured water and sewage treatment plants, well pumping



stations, fish ladders, estuaries, reservoirs, lakes and rivers to learn all about their town’s water supply and important local water features. They also did a series of hands-on activities, and completed a water stewardship worksheet with their parents to see how many gallons of water they could save in their homes by finding undiscovered water leaks, installing water conserving appliances and changing lawn watering practices.

Greenscapes on the North Shore

The Greenscapes North Shore Coalition has created two refrigerator magnets featuring Greenscaping principles. One is focused on lawn care practices; the other, which is called **Green Your Yard** is more general. To obtain these magnets, contact your city or town if you live in one of these participating communities: Andover, Beverly, Boxford, Danvers, Georgetown, Marblehead, Merrimac, Newbury, North Reading, Peabody, Rowley, Salem, Salisbury, Topsfield and West Newbury.

Friends of Greenscapes Events

From: The Northeast Organic Farmers’ Association

NOFA Organic Lawn & Turf Course
Thursday, August 5, 2010
Save the Bay building, Providence, RI

This 6th annual day-long intensive course covers all aspects of organic turfgrass and lawn management including why go organic, soil health and cultural practices, pest/disease management, soil amendments and client relations. Sign up by July 1 and register at the reduced cost of \$125.

<http://www.organiclandcare.net/education/lawnandturf>

From: Ecological Landscaping Association

Sustainable Landscape Design – An Inspiring Day in the Berkshires

Saturday, July 10 10:00 AM – 3:30 PM

Beaver Lodge, 719 Barnes Road, Shelburne Falls, MA
Come to Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts for an inspiring day in the foothills of the Berkshires. Marie Stella invites us into Beaver Lodge, her LEED Platinum certified home and hands-on sustainability laboratory. Beginning with an introduction to the sustainable systems in the house design, we move into the landscape where Marie will share her ecological design techniques and introduce us to: the innovative use of native plant materials, construction of rain gardens, green roofs, vegetated walls & vertical landscapes, rainwater harvesting (complete with cistern and pond with bio-regeneration area), forest management, and edible landscape elements including an organic vegetable gardening.

<http://www.ecolandscaping.org/events.html>

Valuable New Resource from the New England Wildflower Society

TRY OUT NEWFS' ONLINE WOODY PLANT IDENTIFIER

The latest release of the New England Wild Flower Society's (NEWFS) electronic key to the native and naturalized woody plants of New England is now available for testing. The ***Plant Identifier New England (PINE)*** Woody Plants is a prototype for a complete electronic flora of New England, which is based on the upcoming field manual to the region being prepared by their Research Botanist, Arthur Haines. Take PINE out for a spin and please be sure to fill out the online survey located on the website. Your comments will help them produce the best identification tool possible. [Click here to access PINE.](#)

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