



Maryland Pesticide-Free Yards

Pledge to make a difference!

sc.org/PesticideFreeYards

What are lawn and gardening pesticides? Though often misunderstood to refer only to insecticides, pesticides include herbicides (weed killers), fungicides, and others. Pesticides are, by their very nature, poisons. Exposure to pesticides can impact the health of people and pets. Children are especially vulnerable to its' toxic effects. Pesticides can drift to contaminate the air we breathe and run off to pollute our waterways, including our drinking water sources.



Bees and other pollinators are in alarming decline

Our yards are important habitats for bees and pollinators. However, the use of pesticides can expose bees and wildlife to a “toxic soup” of chemicals and destroy forage plants (like clovers and wildflowers) needed by bees and pollinators to survive.

In 2015, Maryland beekeepers lost 60 percent of their bees. These losses are unprecedented and unsustainable. Numbers of the once common rusty patched bumblebee has dropped almost 90%. This native bumblebee is now declared federally endangered. Research overwhelmingly shows that some common ingredients (neonicotinoids, aka neonic) in lawn and garden pesticides, and used on nursery plants can kill and harm bees and other pollinators, such as butterflies and birds. This poses a serious threat to our food. 1 in 3 bites of food we eat depend on bees and pollinators.

Making yards & communities safer for people, pets & wildlife

Ordinary people, backyard gardeners, groups, and communities can make a difference by moving towards safer and sustainable lawn and landscaping practices, and actively raising awareness about bee and pollinator decline.

- **Go pesticide-free. Take the Pesticide-Free Yards Pledge!**

Join fellow Marylanders — commit to eliminating or reduce outdoor pesticide use (including herbicides) as much as possible. Pledge your yard at: www.sc.org/PesticideFreeYards. Increase your tolerance to a few bugs or weeds. Transition to safer lawn care that doesn't require chemical weed or insecticide treatments. If using a professional landscaper, ask for pesticide-free options. If you must use chemicals as a last resort, there are many non-toxic and less-toxic products on the market. Adopt best practices to control outdoor pests and weeds, learn how at Beyond Pesticides: beyondpesticides.org/resources/managesafe

- **Plant to welcome bees and pollinators**

Choose native plants whenever possible—they support more species of native bees, pollinators and birds. Request for neonic-free plants or organic seeds from local or online nurseries. Consider leaving some clovers, dandelions, and wildflowers for bees and pollinators to forge. Find lists of Maryland native plants and get started at: nps.gov/plants/pubs/nativesmd/info.htm



- **Share and spread the word!**

Your voice is powerful. Friends, family, neighbors tend to give more consideration to issues shared with them by someone they know. Share about the decline of bees and pollinators, what you are doing in your yard, or about the harmful effects of pesticides. Share this flyer with a neighbor! Put up a “Pesticide-Free” yard sign to raise neighborhood awareness. Get started with Beyond Pesticides’ neighbor talking tips: bit.ly/bp-tipsfortalking

- **Volunteer some of your time**

Contact **Sierra Club Maryland** to find out how you can help bees even more. From adults to kids, bees could sure use you on the team! Send us an email at: PesticideFree@MDSierra.org

Creating a Healthy, Pesticide-Free Lawn

Transitioning away from harmful pesticides is not a product-for-product replacement but is using a smarter whole systems approach that may take some time as the health of the soil and lawn begins to improve, and can be done easily by either homeowners or landscape companies. These tips from BeyondPesticides.org will help you eliminate the conditions that causes weeds:



- **Reduce Compaction**—Compaction invites weeds. If your lawn is hard, compacted, and full of weeds, aerate to help air, water and fertilizer to enter.
- **Mow High**—Mowing too low stresses the grass and invites weeds to invade. Mow at 3-3.5 inches to shade out weeds and foster deep, drought-resistant roots. Keep mower blades sharp to prevent fungal disease, or ask your service provider to sharpen their blades frequently.
- **Soil pH and Testing**—A soil test is highly recommended to determine the soil pH and specific nutrient needs. Contact your extension service to find out how to take a soil sample. Ideal pH should be between 6.5-7.0, slightly acidic.
- **Fertility**—The soil test will help you determine your soil's specific nutrient needs. Leave clippings on the lawn to help return nitrogen and nutrients back into the soil. Top dress with compost. If needed, apply an organic slow release fertilizer in the fall season. Be sure to follow state fertilizer laws to protect our waterways.
- **Watering and Drainage**—Drought, excessive watering or poor drainage are all invitations for weeds. Generally, a deep watering of about one-inch once a week in the early morning is best.
- **Over-seed**—Dense turf out-competes weeds. Over-seed in the spring or ideally in the fall with the proper grass seed for the region to promote dense turf. Consult with the local extension service website to learn the best grass variety for the region and site conditions (sun or shade). Be sure to over-seed bare spots and thin areas.

Source: Beyond Pesticides. Read your weeds: A simple guide to creating a healthy lawn.

