

Simple Steps for Your Health and the Earth

The Great Outdoors



Riverdale Nature Preservancy

Outdoor activities are an essential part of healthy living, whether working in the yard or just having fun.

Here are some Simple Steps* you can take to make your time outdoors safer and healthier for you, your family and our shared environment.

Also see the bottom of the page, for [how to support new regulations and legislation](#) >>

Easy does it

Avoid use of Common Pesticides & Herbicides on lawns, gardens & in homes

There are many alternatives to chemical pesticides & fertilizers which pollute the environment & pose significant risk to human health.

Select organic products

For example - organic grass seed v. genetically modified seed designed to be used with pesticides. See Safelawns.org

Use Integrative Pest Management

Limit damage from insects & rodents without toxic chemicals. See BeyondPesticides.org

Spread Organic Mulch (shredded bark)

Suppresses weeds and conserves water around plantings

Consult the Experts

Seek out gardeners trained in safe gardening methods or willing to learn them.

See Safelawns.org, and [Northeast Organic Farmers Association \(NOFA\) Accredited Organic Land Care Professionals](http://NortheastOrganicFarmersAssociation.org)

Remove shoes at the door

Avoid tracking in toxins from the street. Keep children & pets off properties with little yellow flags warning that pesticides have been applied

Abandon the "Perfect Lawn"

Allow grass to grow to 2 1/2-3 inches high to naturally shade out sun-loving weeds; Learn to live with a small amount of weeds, weed them by hand, or seed over them.

Troublesome tools of the trade

Leaf Blowers:

- are noisy
- create air pollution through fuel combustion & by stirring up dirt, pollen, mold & other irritants
- waste lots of energy

Children and the elderly tend to be the most vulnerable to respiratory problems and hearing loss, but everyone benefits from reducing noise & air pollution throughout the neighborhood.

Alternatives:

- Cross the street or change your route when you hear the noise or see clouds of dust raised by leaf blowers
- Ask your gardener or maintenance team to use rakes, brooms, and rolling leaf sweepers for tidying up - it will cost more but consider the health and environmental gains.
- Accept the presence of a few leaves or petals on the ground at times v. "blow it all away" immaculate tidiness
- Break down fall leaves with a mulching lawn mower, then rake them into planting beds to make your own nourishing compost over the winter (Email Bronx Green-Up at bronxgreenup@nybg.org for composting guidance. You can also [learn how to compost at NYC's WasteLess website](#))

Diesel-powered Lawn Mowers:

Another noisy polluter

Alternatives:

See [Cornell University's Healthy Lawn Overview](#)

Use Grass/ Lawn Alternatives

Food for thought: Grow herbs & vegetables

See [The National Gardening Association Vegetable Gardening Guide](#)

Color my world: Plant flowers & flowering shrubs that nourish pollinators like bees and butterflies

See [NY Botanical Garden Tips for Attracting Birds, Bees and Butterflies](#)

Run for cover: Ground covers don't need mowing, naturally suppresses weeds, and once established, may need little to no water

See [Organic Gardening's guide to grass alternatives](#)



- For small areas, the new lighter, low-maintenance hand-pushed mowers can be quiet, effective and nonpolluting.
See the [Union of Concerned Scientists' Climate-Friendly Gardener guide](#)
- Electric corded or rechargeable lawn mowers are quieter and less polluting (some are solar-powered)

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Action:

1. Talk with local legislators about what the current regulations are in regards to noise pollution, emissions standards and pesticide use. Consider advocating for safer policies.
2. Express your support for a proposed NYC seasonal ban on leaf blower use along with yard tool noise limits by contacting Councilman Andrew Cohen at 718-549-7300. You can also let him know that you would like to see pesticides eliminated from our parks.
3. At least 15 Westchester municipalities have passed leaf blower bans/restrictions including New Rochelle, Scarsdale, Yonkers, Hastings & White Plains. Local gardeners have all adapted to the restrictions.

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* Simple Steps

The Simple Steps series summarizes information learned at a local community forum about protecting people from common toxic substances and products typically found in our homes. A pediatrician from The Mount Sinai Hospital's Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit spoke about potential serious health harm posed by many plastics, personal care products, cleaning formulas, and yard care methods. Community environmental advocates shared ideas on simple steps for making changes within our homes in order to create a healthier environment.

Organizers of the forum continue to look for ways to share this information so that others can make more informed choices about the products they buy and the practices they use in and around their home and community. One of the organizers, Ann Rauch -- a Riverdale resident,

social worker, environmental advocate, and board member of the Riverdale Nature Preservancy -- authored three of the four pieces in the series. The Yard Care piece was written by Alisa Eilenberg, also a Riverdale resident and environmental activist.

We hope you find this information useful. Please share it with others.

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