

## YOU CAN CHOOSE AN OPTION TO LAWNS:

The U.S. has twenty million acres of residential lawns. For many Americans, their lawn is a source of pride and joy that they spend countless hours and large sums of money maintaining. Unfortunately, this love affair with the “perfect” lawn has some problematic side effects.

- Three million tons of fertilizers are applied to these lawns each year; a significant portion of this ends up contaminating groundwater, lakes, ponds and estuaries.
- Each year 40 million American lawnmowers are responsible for 5% of the nation’s air pollution.
- U.S. municipalities use 30-60% of their annual fresh water supply to irrigate lawns.
- A New York State study of bird mortality found that 1 of 6 deaths was the result of exposure to pesticides and toxins used in lawn care.

## SUGGESTIONS IF YOU HAVE A LAWN:

- Minimize your lawn area or eliminate it completely and replace it with native grasses, shrubs or trees that require no fertilization, irrigation or pesticides.
- Establish your lawn by using a mixture of hardy grass seeds, including fescues.
- Wean your lawn of fertilizers. If you need to fertilize, do so only every 3-5 years and use slow organic fertilizer.
- Set the mower blade at 3 inches high and leave clippings on the lawn.
- Do not use chemical pesticides (including insecticides, weed killers and fungicides) or synthetic fertilizers. These will kill the beneficial organisms in the soil.
- Do you employ a lawn care company? Make sure you know what they are doing.

## GOING ORGANIC CAN BE HEALTHY & COST LESS:

Chemical pesticides are used on residential, commercial and public properties for a variety of reasons. Some of these chemicals, as well as their breakdown products (called “metabolites”), are known to cause cancer; others have no known safe level of ingestion. Many of these chemicals have been detected in our drinking water.

Insect pesticides are rarely species-specific. Our war against insect pests has had some unintended but significant casualties. These include:

- butterflies, honey bees and other important plant pollinators;
- damselflies, dragonflies, and other beneficial insectivores;
- tiny insects that play key roles in the health of the soil community;
- numerous aquatic insects that play critical roles in the aquatic food chain.

## WHAT YOU CAN CHOOSE TO DO:

- Turn off your bug zapper. These devices do not attract mosquitoes or other biting insects, but do kill lots of harmless insects.

- Insect repellants containing DEET are effective, but use this pesticide sparingly, if at all.
- Join the Suffolk County Mosquito Control “No Spray” registry by calling (631) 852-4270.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR LANDSCAPING WITH NATIVE PLANTS:

Residential development on Eastern Long Island has transformed thousands of acres of natural habitat into suburban landscapes, resulting in the loss of native flora and fauna. Here are some interesting aspects of this issue to consider:

- Native plants are more tolerant of local weather and soil conditions, requiring no fertilization or irrigation and less work to maintain than many non-native ornamental landscape plants.
- Native plantings provide a source of seeds that can help restore nearby natural areas that have been disturbed.
- Some non-native landscaping material can escape into the wild and overtake native plants that animals depend upon for food and cover.
- Native plants can support up to 50% more species of native wildlife than non-native plants.
- Native plants can provide a diverse supply of cones, berries, seeds and other foods that help native wildlife by providing food that is part of their natural diet.

#### YOU CAN CHOOSE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE:

With a little knowledge, every homeowner can help restore some of the environmental value, beauty and diversity of our native landscape. If every homeowner on the East End reduced their lawn by 35 to 50%, thousands of acres of habitat for native plants and animals could be restored. In addition, millions of gallons of irrigation water could be saved and pesticide and fertilizer use substantially reduced. Won't you help?

- Identify the portion of your property that could be transformed into an area for natural plantings.
- Where possible, layout your natural planting area to link with adjacent undeveloped areas to increase the value of existing habitats.
- Incorporate groundcovers, low shrubs, tall shrubs, small trees and large trees in your landscape plan. These layers of vegetation enhance the plan's wildlife habitat value, as do fruit or nut producing plants and water.