

## **The Perfect Lawn**

The perfect lawn does not exist. You are working against nature when attempting to grow a weed-free, mono cultured lawn.

Prior to WWI and WWII, only the very rich had nice looking lawns. After WWII there were vast stockpiles of nitrogen, trinitrotoluene (TNT) leftover from the production of bombs, bullets, grenades etc.

The government in their infinite wisdom, decided to use the nitrates in agriculture. After a few years, the farmers noticed the livestock reproduction numbers were significantly reduced. Instead of examining the livestock feed and how it was being grown, the government came up with hormone treatments to enhance livestock reproduction.

This was the beginning of the modern age of big Ag and the professional lawn care industry. Unfortunately, it was the beginning of the end of the era of the family farm.

I have been in the professional landscape industry for over 4 decades years. I began my career as a grower at an upscale greenhouse nursery. I grew everything from soup to nuts. I grew annual bedding plants, perennials, ornamentals, poinsettias, vegetables, herbs, trees, and shrubs.

I started my own full-service landscape company at the age of twenty-five and after a few years of mowing, pruning, mulching, landscape design and installation, I began to get more and more requests for chemical lawn care services.

One of the main reasons I left the greenhouse world was all the harsh chemicals I had to apply to the crops, daily. Back then, the chemicals were much more toxic than today's alternatives.

I was on a mission to find and develop fertilizers and control products that would be less harmful from a health standpoint and less harmful to the environment but also products that had efficacy. My journey took me down a path of experimentation and self-discovery. Back then there were few options to maintain a landscape organically that did not involve intensive labor and higher costs.

I sold my successful lawn care business after 15 years began manufacturing fertilizers produced from recycled waste. I learned how to formulate organic based fertilizers that not only worked as well if not better than conventional fertilizers, but they were competitively priced and super-efficient. I travelled the whole country, educating thousands of professional lawn care companies on sustainable solutions. I supported these companies and helped them grow their businesses. I worked with some of the largest professional landscape distributors/suppliers and turf application companies in the world.

What I witnessed was both alarming and disturbing. This disturbing behavior engulfs the entire Green Industry. From manufacturing to service companies. From politics to some of the most prestigious universities in the United States. I connected the dots going back centuries and learned how we have evolved into a society that values money over health. Power over preservation. Ego over common sense.

I am merely a student. I have an interest in all sciences but what I am truly passionate about is turf science and soil science.

Over eighty percent of all Americans have a lawn. Seventy nine percent say that a lawn is a must when renting or buying a home.

Forty percent of Americans with a yard, hired professional lawn and landscape companies.

The Professional Landscape Industry employs more than 1 million people and represents over six hundred thousand businesses.

Covid -19 sparked a massive increase (over sixteen million people) in the number of people that garden and or maintain a lawn. The highest increase was in those aged between 25 years and 45 years old.

In 2018, nearly 9 out of 10 (90 percent) of all adults 25 years or older reported they had completed at least high school, or obtained a GED/high school equivalency certificate. Over one in three adults (35 percent) had obtained at least a bachelor's degree. Both measures are all time highs.

The statistic depicts the average spend per household on lawn care and gardening activities in the United States from 2009 to 2017. In 2017, the average spending on lawn care per household amounted to 503 U.S. dollars. Americans spent slightly more than \$29.1 billion on lawn care in 2015, roughly equal to \$90.23 per person.

There are an estimated 40 to 50 million acres of managed lawns in the United States: 40% is residential lawns, 20% is utility lines, and roadsides, and about 3% is on golf courses. The remaining turf accounts for public parks, fields, utility right of ways and other green areas.

Lawns are an American obsession. Since the mass proliferation of suburbs in the 1950s and '60s, these pristine carpets of green turf have been meticulously maintained by suburbanites, with grass length and other aesthetic considerations enforced with

bylaws and by homeowner associations.

Our addiction to lawns means that grass is the single largest irrigated agricultural “crop” in America, more than corn, wheat, and fruit orchards combined. There are 63,000 square miles of turf grass in the United States, covering an area larger than Georgia. That is over 40 million acres.

The average American family uses 320 gallons of water per day, about 30 percent of which is devoted to outdoor uses. More than half of that outdoor water is used for watering lawns and gardens.

Lawns are indicative of success; they are a physical manifestation of the American Dream of home ownership. To have a well-maintained lawn is a sign to others that you have the time and/or the money to support this attraction. It signifies that you care about belonging and want others to see that you are like them.

Don't get me wrong. I believe in lawns. There are many benefits to lawns. They are a filter for toxic substances that can end up in our water, making lawns a very important part of storm water management. They produce oxygen for the atmosphere. They help to cool the planet and save energy. They are pleasing to look at, especially in a nicely landscaped yard with blooming plants and neatly mulched flower beds. This increases property value and provides a sense of wellbeing that reduces stress and anxiety for the homeowner.

I believe lawns can be grown and maintained through sustainable, low environmental impact solutions that are safer, healthier, and better for our environment, without the overuse of harsh chemicals.

A word of warning to all of you would-be warriors that insist on doing it all yourself, it is not easy growing and maintaining a beautiful lawn. It is a science that is directly connected to the unpredictability of nature. There are more ways that you can destroy your hard work than there are ways to fix it.

If you are a novice, my advice is to find a licensed and insured expert, hire that expert and learn. All the do-it-yourself lawn care books and classes at the local extension service will not prepare you to the degree required to be successful. Every lawn is different. Soil conditions vary. The soil biomass is complex and ever-changing. Even the most seasoned, veteran, lawn applicator will admit, they are still learning. It is the same with any industry. The best of the best and most experienced in their field are merely students.

On my 40-year path to self-discovery, I learned more lessons the hard way than I learned from a book. I tried my hand at tree work and quickly realized, I did not have what it takes to be an arborist. I challenge you to find a tree guy/gal with more than 10 years of experience that does not have a (I fell out of a tree) story.

My point here is, do not attempt to do a job when you lack the experience, the specialized equipment, and the common sense to do the job the right way. Hire a licensed and insured, experienced professional that is equipped to handle the job. By the time you go out and buy everything you need to do a job, you have spent nearly the cost of hiring a professional, especially when you factor in the hours you spent running down to the big box store to purchase what you need. Let's be honest. You almost never buy everything you need in one trip. There's always a second or third trip to the store once you get eyeball deep into a project.

This applies to lawn care just as much as any home improvement project. My philosophy is to stick to what you do best in an effort to make more money so you can pay a professional to do the jobs that you lack the experience to do.

