

## MAYOR'S COLUMN

As Spring approaches, it is not too early to consider alternative methods to care for your lawn and shrubs during the coming season. As more evidence points to the adverse effects on human health and the environment posed by synthetic pesticides, there is increasing interest in chemical free lawn care. I urge you to explore the chemical free alternatives and if you plan to employ a landscaper, now is the time to discuss product use on your property.

Americans apply 80 million pounds of pesticides annually at a cost of \$2 billion and use is increasing annually. Many of the pesticides used since their popularity began in the 1960's are only now being tested for toxicity, and chemicals banned in other countries are still in use in the United States.

Of particular concern are our young children. Due to their behavior, children are also uniquely vulnerable to pesticide exposure. Children spend more time in playgrounds, playing on the grass and outdoors in general. Lawn pesticides can remain on the grass long after the little yellow warning flags are removed. The pesticide can be inhaled, absorbed through the skin, carried home on the soles of shoes and inadvertently ingested when children put unwashed hands in their mouths.

If a homeowner or their lawn care professional chooses to spray chemicals on a lawn, it is important to notify neighbors so that windows can be closed and animals and toys brought inside.

When transitioning from chemical lawn care to organic products, the first step is to have the soil tested. Because of years of pesticide use, beneficial organisms that provided natural pest control, soil aeration and plant nutrition have been depleted or destroyed. To rebuild soil, natural lawn programs need to include aeration, compost applications, seeding with grasses best suited to our area, and applications of organic fertilizer.

Other tips to maintain a healthy, natural lawn include mowing the grass high to two or three inches, which promotes the growth of stronger more viable turf. Watering deeply into the soil in the early morning hours is also a suggested practice. This encourages deep root growth creating heartier plants that are more drought resistant. Organic fertilizers should be applied in the Fall and Spring. Also, over seeding or re-seeding in the early Fall builds stronger turf which is ultimately the most effective weed control. Property owners had beautiful lawns in the 1950s when no chemicals were applied to the soil.

Now is the time to speak with your landscaper so he can order the appropriate products.

This year, Westchester County residents have many more natural lawn care solutions available thanks to the Grassroots Healthy Lawn Program, a joint initiative of the County and Grassroots Environmental Education. For a list of landscapers offering natural lawn care programs and retailers carrying natural lawn care products, visit the program website at [www.grassrootsinfo.org](http://www.grassrootsinfo.org) or call the program office at (914) 722-2141.

Other websites with extensive information about organic lawn care include [www.organiclandcare.net](http://www.organiclandcare.net) and [www.livinglawn.org](http://www.livinglawn.org).

In an effort to lead by example, the Village will use only natural non-chemical products on all public open space. A decision to stop using pesticides benefits not only one's immediate family but neighbors, pets and wildlife throughout the Village.