

## 5 Ways to Improve Your Green Spaces

**1. Take care of your grass.** While this may seem like an obvious piece of advice, it's often overlooked. Taking care of your own front yard is a good first step toward protecting and maintaining your green space. Lawns play a major role in protecting ground water by reducing runoff, thus preventing soil erosion, maintaining soil permeability and conserving water. Lawns also provide an extension of your overall living space, and for many families they become an enjoyable private oasis.

**2. Choose flowers and plants that suit your area's climate.** It's imperative to choose plants and flowers that tolerate your area's climate. Choosing the correct plants will ensure a beautiful garden year after year and make the job of caring for your plants much easier. Having a beautiful green space has also been known to lower blood pressure, reduce muscle tension, improve attention spans and reduce feelings of fear and aggression.

**3. Prune, prune, prune.** Pruning is important to maintain your flowers, plants and shrubs year after year, but it also needs to be done correctly. Improper pruning can actually be more harmful than neglecting to prune completely. Proper pruning will produce better blooms, maintain a plant's desired size, and can even rejuvenate an older shrub. Having well-maintained flowers and shrubs will not only make your green space more attractive, but it will also provide a protective habitat for birds and other creatures that serve to enhance the natural beauty of your outdoor living space.

**4. Enrich your soil with a compost pile.** Who knew those old coffee grounds, filters and dryer lint could be the golden ticket to creating a beautiful green space? These types of materials, combined with yard clippings, wood chips and leaves, regenerate your soil. The breakdown of these materials creates humus, which is a nutrient-filled material, helping the soil to retain moisture. Compost can also cut down on plant disease and repel pests that are damaging to your yard. Creating a compost pile will not only provide rich nutrients that your soil needs, but it also helps the environment by cutting back on landfill waste, thus extending the life of the landfill.

**5. Plant a tree.** Planting a tree is one of the most simple and effective activities you can perform to improve your green space. In areas of new construction, many neighborhoods start out virtually treeless. The results include high cooling costs, less oxygen and more pollutants. There are many trees that are inexpensive and fast-growing. In fact, some can grow up to 12' per year, quickly reversing the effects of new construction. Trees not only help to keep the heat out of the house, but they also cool the outside temperature around your home as well. A study in Huntsville, Ala. showed a 31-degree difference between the shaded and unshaded areas of a parking lot. By using trees to modify temperatures, the amount of fossil fuels used for cooling and heating is reduced.

Updating and maintaining your green spaces is easy! The environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits that trees, grass, shrubs and flowers provide are well worth the extra effort it takes to create and maintain a well-manicured landscape.