

Corner for Small Change – March Newsletter

And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. Genesis 1:30

By now, everyone has had enough winter even though it has been a relatively mild one. We look forward to the warmer, longer days, the smell of the earth waking up again and that special shade of green that grass has when it starts to grow again. Soon thereafter, many of us will apply some lawn product to our grass always hoping that it will somehow look similar to the 14th hole on the golf course.

Many of the standard lawn products offered for sale are toxic to wildlife, fish unlucky enough to be affected by rain run off, birds, earthworms and us. Just read the warning on the package sometime. Many of these products also incorporate municipal sludge from waste treatment plants as part of the fertilizer component – they just call it Bio-solids. A few statistics about lawns:

- 30% of water on the East Coast is used to water lawns.
- The average suburban lawn receives 10 times the amount of chemical pesticide per acre as farmland.
- Over **70 million tons** of fertilizers and pesticides are applied to residential lawns and gardens annually.
- Pesticides kill 60-90% of earthworms where applied. Earthworms are the natural soil aerators and provide the highest quality natural fertilizer.

There are natural alternatives available. One that is becoming increasingly available is Corn Gluten meal. It is an all natural by product of the corn starch process and serves as a pre-emergence herbicide which prevents weed seeds from sprouting and provides a slow gentle release of nitrogen to feed your lawn. It is completely safe – you can put your hands in it and no lawn moratorium for the kids and pets after application – unlike the lawns with the little flags. It can be used in a spreader applied around the time forsythia blooms and can often be found at local garden centers. It is also available online – check out www.gluten.iastate.edu and click on the licensees link for suppliers. If you use a lawn service, ask about natural products that can be used, some companies even specialize in them.

Other suggestions for a healthy lawn:

- Set the mowing height to 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches. Shorter grass grows faster to compensate for the loss of surface area and dries out faster because the roots receive less shade. Grass that is left at this longer height can have roots that reach a four foot depth compared to 18 inches for short grass.

- Water deeply but infrequently - about once inch of water per week.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn, they will feed the grass as they decompose.

As Christians, we are called to be stewards of this wonderful gift from God. Sometimes it just requires awareness and a little planning ahead.