

Subscribe to Our Newsletter:



[EAT & DRINK](#) [STAY & PLAY](#) [REAL ESTATE](#) [EVENTS](#) [ABOUT](#) [CONTACT](#) [ADVERTISE](#) [WRITE THE EDITOR](#) [REGISTER](#)
[LOG IN](#)



Browse by [Topic](#) [Location](#)

Featured

North Fork

02/26/15 11:13am

Tips from East End pros on making your lawn really 'green'

by [Rachel Young](#) [Grow](#) [No Comments](#)

Like [Share](#) [Tweet](#) [g+](#) [StumbleUpon](#)



Credit: Photo courtesy of Rose Cromwell/Perfect Earth Project

East Hampton landscape designer and Perfect Earth Project president Edwina von Gal has always been committed to healthy living, but there was a time when she didn't give much thought to the pesticides she used to treat her clients' lawns.

"Ever since I was young, I had a vegetable garden and it was always organic, but I never really thought about that being applied to landscapes," she said. "Then I realized, 'Wait a minute.'

"There's something everybody can do that's really major and it's immediately going to help your health and your children and your pets. And you're also doing something fantastic for the environment."

That "something" is implementing toxin-free lawn care practices, a topic that was discussed Feb. 13 during an all-day seminar sponsored by Perfect Earth Project at Riverhead Volunteer Fire Department.



Places To Live [See All Real Estate >](#)



Greenport
\$999,000
5 BD / 2.5 BA
4800 Sq Ft
Sale

Town And Country Real Estate
Nicholas Planamento



Mattituck
\$749,000
4 BD / 2 BA
1700 Sq Ft
Sale

Beninati Associates
Marie Beninati



Southold
\$1,270,000
3 BD / 2 BA
1900 Sq Ft
Sale

Open to the public and attended largely by professionals from research and environmental groups such as Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County and the Peconic Land Trust, the seminar included speeches about the health risks of conventional landscape pesticides and an overview of the toxin-free approach and best management practices.

Founded two years ago by Ms. von Gal, Perfect Earth Project is a nonprofit that “promotes toxin-free lawn and landscape management for the benefit of human health and the environment,” according to its mission statement.

Despite their prevalence, many of the 30 most common lawn pesticides have been linked to birth defects, neurotoxicity, liver or kidney damage and the majority are skin irritants, said Sean O’Neill, director of education and outreach at Perfect Earth Project.

“Managing lawns without conventional chemicals is entirely possible,” O’Neill said. “It just takes a different approach. And the more people learn how to do it and the more homeowners demand this approach, the easier it will be as we go along.”

Below are von Gal’s and O’Neill’s top tips for taking care of your property sans chemicals.

1. First things first

“If you have an irrigation system, open it up in the spring but do not turn it on,” von Gal advised. “Do not start irrigating your lawn until your lawn is dry.”

This is important because over-watering promotes shallow rooting, fungal diseases and nutrient runoff and attracts mosquitoes, she said. For best results, wait until your lawn’s soil dries down to about four inches.

2. Healthy soil equals healthy grass

An easy way to improve your lawn’s quality is by mowing it properly, O’Neill said.

“Mow high, between three-and-a-half and four inches,” he said. “When grass is longer, it’s a healthier plant. Think of it as a little solar panel. The bigger the grass is, the more power it’s getting from the sun.”

3. When it comes to watering, less is more

“Water once a week in cooler weather and twice a week in hotter weather,” O’Neill said. “But when you do water, water for a long time. The idea is you want the soil to stay moist rather than continually just giving it little shots of water.”

For optimal results, he said, allow the water to drain down to four inches. Use a soil probe for accurate measuring.

4. Fertilize in the fall

“Turf grass is a cool-season plant and the vast majority of its root growth happens in the fall,” said O’Neill, who recommends homeowners use compost or purchase slow-release fertilizer, which is produced from natural sources, like chicken manure and bone meal, and is available at most retailers like Agway and Home Depot.

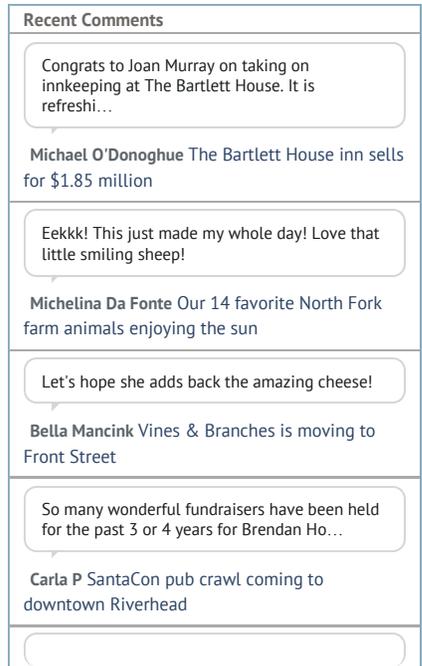
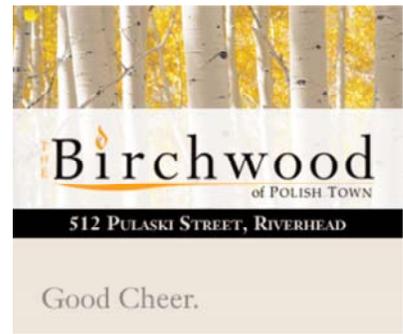
“If you fertilize in the fall, you create a healthy turf that won’t need excess fertilizer throughout the spring and summer,” he said.

5. CONTROL WEEDS AND INSECTS NATURALLY

Mowing high and fertilizing in the fall will help keep your lawn healthy, decreasing the chance weeds will make their home there, said Ms. von Gal. But if you do spot a patch of dandelions or crabgrass, take care of the problem using little more than your hands, she said.

“If you see a dandelion and just can’t stand the sight of it, just pull it out with a Japanese hori hori knife,” Ms. von Gal said. “It will take the whole thing out. And there’s nothing more satisfying than tearing out crabgrass with your hands.”

As for insects, “one of the benefits of the toxin-free approach is that you don’t kill beneficial insects such as ladybugs or praying mantises, Mr. O’Neill said. “These insects naturally control many ‘pest’ insects.”



For stubborn infestations, he recommends using natural products including horticultural soaps and oils, beneficial bacteria sprays and essential oils like wintergreen or rosemary.

ryoung@timesreview.com

[Real Estate](#)

Spotlight Businesses

Pizza
**Rolling in Dough
Pizza**
Greenport
📍 P.O. Box 409

Hotels And Motels
Townsend Manor Inn
Greenport
📍 714 Main St

Food And Dining
Wayside Market
Southold
📍 55575 Route 25

Wineries And Vineyards
**Martha Clara
Vineyards**
Riverhead
📍 6025 Sound Ave

[< Previous Post](#)

[Jamesport Country Kitchen is 'What's for Lunch?'](#)

[Next Post >](#)

[Advertisement](#)

Bah. I knew OMally's was up for sale for some time... I knew Phil was ready to go. Wh...

[Tracey Bagatta O'Mally's in Southold reopens Thursday with a new look, owner](#)

Tag Cloud

Aquebogue Bedell Cellars Craft Beer Cutchogue
East End Arts East Marion **Greenport** Greenport
Harbor Brewing Company Hotel Indigo East End **Jamesport**
John Ross Lieb Cellars **Live Music Long Island**
Louisa Hargrave Martha Clara Vineyards **Mattituck** Noah's
north fork North Fork Dream Home
north fork open houses **North Fork Real**
Estate On The Rock Open House Orient Our
weekend pick Paumanok Vineyards Peconic Peconic Landing
Photos **Real Estate** recipe **Riverhead**
Shelter Island Slideshow **Southold** Suffolk
Theater Sunday Scene The Riverhead Project Through
Your Lens Wading River Week in Review What's for Lunch
Wine Wine & Vineyard Events

Leave a Reply

To comment, please [Sign In](#) or [Register](#). Or you can complete the following form.

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment

[Post A Comment](#)