

A Short History of Lawns

“ We hate to mow, and we hate to dwell on the dismal thought that it’s an endless summer job. And yet we fertilize and water and weed and allow our lawns to turn us into male nurses and our wives into grass widows, just to make our lawns grow faster. ”

Michael Allen, “*The Nitty-Gritty of Lawn Care*”
Saturday Evening Post, July-August 1990

Lawns, besides bringing beauty to our properties, reduce erosion purify the air, moderate the temperature, absorb CO2 and release oxygen.

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18th Century — Lawns first appeared in France and England as part of formal gardens. In England, where turf grass grows naturally, meandering open spaces were popular. Often sheep or goats were used to keep the turf grass short. The first lawn mower was invented in 1827 in Britain.

Early 19th Century — Hybrid forms of grasses were developed that would survive in the US, where turf grasses were not native. Even Kentucky Blue Grass is not native to the U.S.

Mid 19th Century — Lawn mowers were invented and herbicides and pesticides created, making a lawn practical. It was not until after the Civil War that lawns began to appear outside middle-class residences.

Early 20th Century — The Professional Golf Association began its long involvement in developing better turf grasses.

1930s— Because of the Depression lawns were too expensive to be kept up.

WWII — People were encouraged to turn their yards into Victory Gardens rather than keeping lawns.

Post WWII — The explosion of suburbia led to the expansion of lawns and lawn care equipment. Magazines promoted the importance of a good lawn.

1950s — “A better world through science” led to the development of pesticides and herbicides. New varieties of grasses were developed, the goal being to find the one perfect variety. The first rotary mower was invented in 1952.

1960s — Many of the lawn chemicals were found to be very detrimental to humans and the environment. Birth defects, liver and kidney damage and reproduction problems developed.

After homeowners and scientists became concerned about the dangers of the lawn care products, such things as chlordane, arsenic and DDT were banned.

1970s — Lawn mowers became easier to operate and as result of the feminist movement more women were willing to participate in lawn care. Arab oil embargo resulted in electric and battery operated mowers. Power trimmers were invented. The string trimmer was invented.

1980s — ChemLawn was created because the standard for a good lawn had become so high and lawn care had become so complicated that a service was required. By 1989 more than 500,000 people made their living directly from lawn care and maintenance. It was a \$25 billion industry.

Grass clippings began to be recycled.

1990s — Homeowners were putting more than ten times the amount of chemicals on their lawns than were farmers on crop fields. As a result of overuse of lawn chemicals thatch became a problem, so new thatch removing equipment was deemed necessary. Lawns became smaller and more area was left natural.

Organic gardening became popular and native grass meadows occasionally replaced traditional lawns.

2000s — A 2001 study showed that some mowers emit the same amount of pollution (emissions other than carbon dioxide) in one hour as driving a 1992 model car for 650 miles. Another estimate puts the amount of pollution from a lawn mower at four times the amount from a car, per hour. Beginning in 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency set standards for lawn equipment emissions and expects a reduction of at least 35%.

If it greens your lawn, it greens the lake.

Is that “lush” lawn more important than a healthy lake?