

Rutgers Master Gardeners of Mercer County Guiding Principles of Responsible Gardening

Responsible gardening considers the environmental consequences, both positive and negative, of what we do in the garden; and results in making choices that do the most good and the least harm. Our mission is to excite, inspire and encourage the residents of Mercer County to participate in the rewarding experience of responsible gardening and pest management. The following Principles help guide our educational initiatives and are adapted from: Lawns & the Environment Initiative (December 15, 2005).

PRINCIPLES	TIPS/EXAMPLES
1. Learn About Your Site or Yard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have soil tested to determine if nutrients/amendments are needed. • Identify sensitive areas such as wildlife nesting places. • Identify problem spots that can be improved with proper landscaping
2. Choose the Right Plant for the Right Spot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select locally adapted species that require less water, fertilizer, pruning and pesticides. • Choose the right plant for the right spot that meets the plant requirements for sun, water, and climate conditions. • Avoid growing invasive plant species.
3. Build Healthy Soil and Use Fertilizers Responsibly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If a fertilizer is needed, choose an organic or conventional product that best fits the needs of your plants and soil conditions. • Always read and follow the label directions and never apply more than necessary. • Observe all laws related to timing of fertilizing and content of fertilizers.
4. Reduce Waste and Recycle Nutrients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave grass clippings in place on the lawn. They slowly release essential nutrients—nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, and minor elements so the lawn is continuously being fertilized. • Make compost that can be used as a natural fertilizer and can add organic matter and microbes to the soil.
5. Attract and Protect Wildlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose plants that can provide food and shelter for birds and other wildlife. • Consider a backyard pond to provide water for wildlife. • Add flowering annuals and perennials that can attract birds, butterflies and bees which are important pollinators.
6. Manage Yard Pests Responsibly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correctly identify any pests and the type of problems they may create. • Change conditions that invite pest problems such as over watering, improper mowing, etc. If problems persist, choose an organic or conventional product that best fits your situation; spot treat for problems and don't use a weed and feed lawn product unless your problem is widespread. • Always read and follow label directions.
7. Use Water Wisely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose plants that are locally adapted or drought tolerant. • Irrigate lawns infrequently but deeply to the depth of the root zone. • Make sure irrigation systems are adjusted properly and repair any leaks. • Consider drip systems to gardens, shrubs and trees.
8. Mow and Prune Responsibly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut your lawn at the highest recommended mower setting leaving it at least 3 inches long during the growing season. • Keep mower tuned up and blades sharp. • Prune properly to retain a tree, shrub or plant's natural form and reduce dead or diseased material.
9. Prevent Landscape Pollution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevent fertilizers, pesticides, yard debris or pet waste from entering water sources or waste water systems. • Use pesticides and fertilizers only when and where needed. • Dispose of oils, paints and other toxic materials in the proper community waste management system and not down storm drains.
10. Reduce Storm Water Runoff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow the rate of runoff and increase soil permeability by adding organic mulch to soil and landscape planting to intercept runoff. • Minimize soil erosion by designing the landscape to spread water flow across the ground surface. • Set mower height high to help prevent storm water runoff.