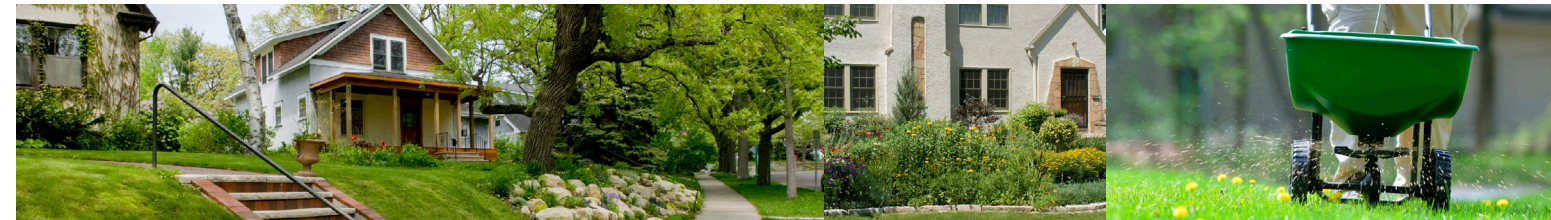


## Yard Care Choices in Urban Living

College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences

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1530 Cleveland Avenue North  
St. Paul, MN 55108-6112



## Yard Care Choices in Urban Living

**Thank you for participating in the “Yard Care Choices in Urban Living” survey sponsored by the University of Minnesota. In April 2011, we sent surveys to households in Lino Lakes and St. Paul’s Highland Park neighborhood, and 942 households responded.**

This report outlines some of the survey results.

### Why do households maintain lawns?

Households maintain lawns for many reasons. Here are some of the important reasons to survey respondents:

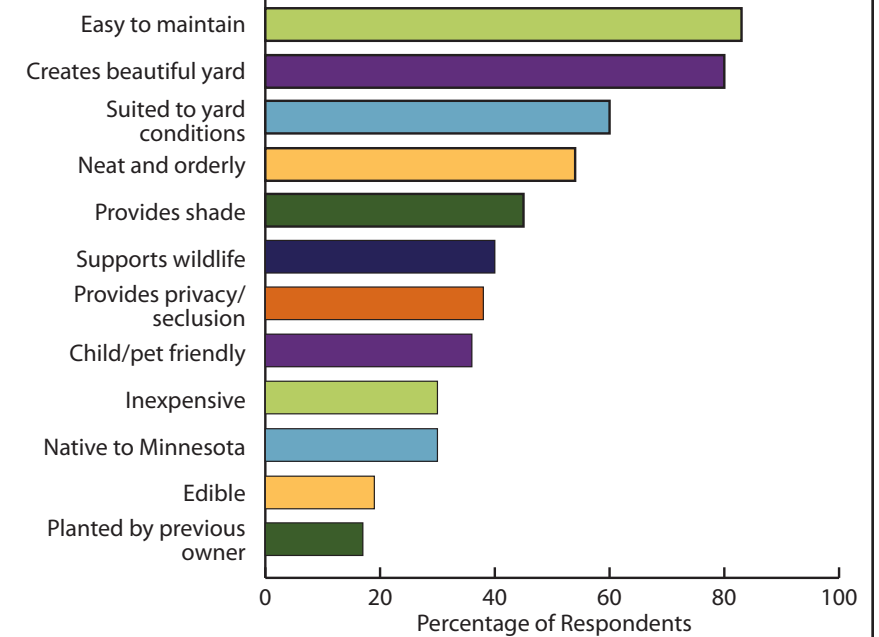
Almost 75% of households maintain lawns as:

- ▶ A place to relax and enjoy being outside
- ▶ An essential part of an attractive property

Almost 50% of households maintain lawns as:

- ▶ A place for children and pets to play
- ▶ Part of being a good neighbor
- ▶ Vegetative cover to prevent soil erosion

### What criteria guide yard vegetation choices?

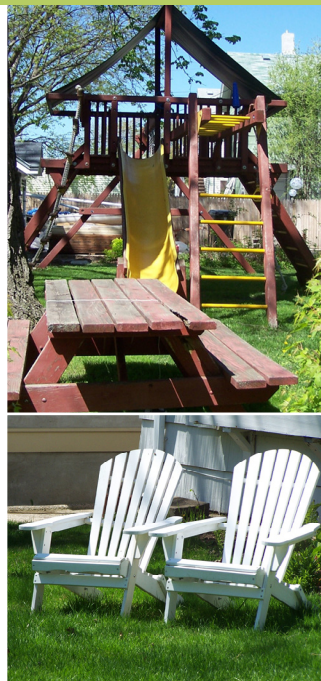


**Thank you for participating in the Yard Care Choices study.**

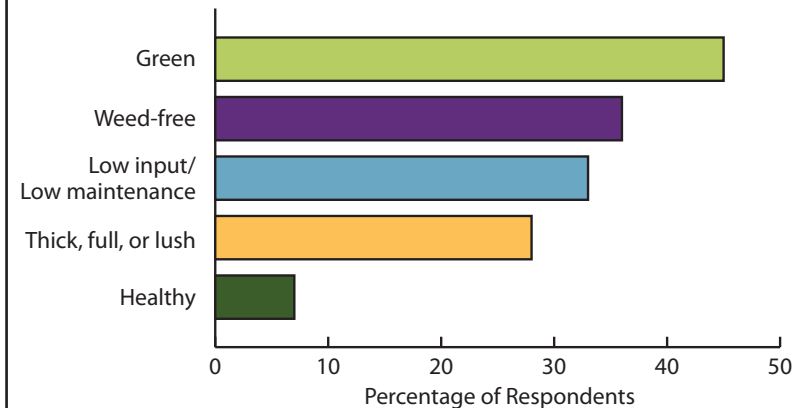
**This is a short report of a few of our study results.**

Your responses are helping us learn more about yard care choices and water quality concerns in the Twin Cities. This information can help us support yard care preferences and water quality at the same time.

For more information about this study, please visit our website at [www.tchep.umn.edu](http://www.tchep.umn.edu).



### What makes an “ideal” lawn?



### ...What do the neighbors think?

83% of people think their neighbors have an expectation or value for well-maintained lawns.

However, the meaning of “well-maintained” is up for debate.





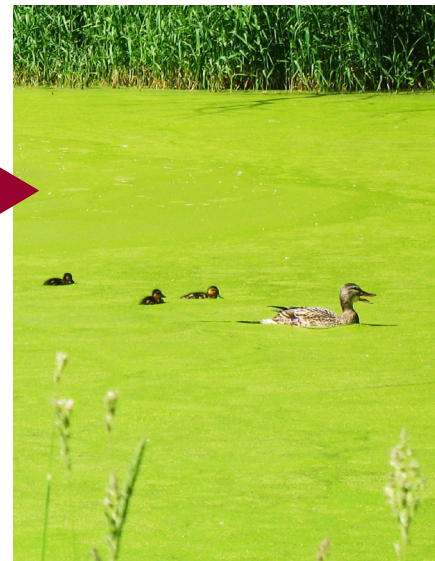
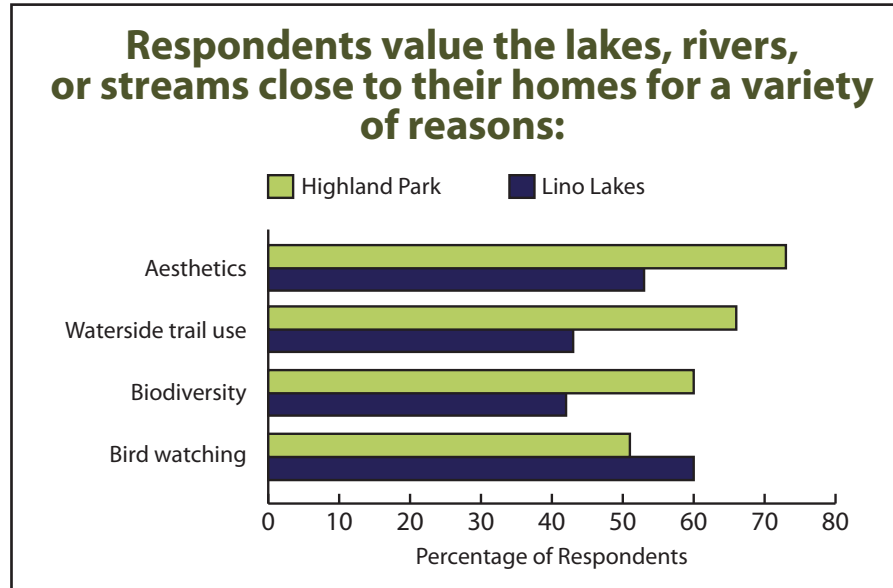
# WATER QUALITY AND YARD CARE CHOICES

**Lawns, trees, and native plantings hold soil in place**, and they absorb and filter water. Trees and native plantings support biodiversity and provide wildlife habitat.

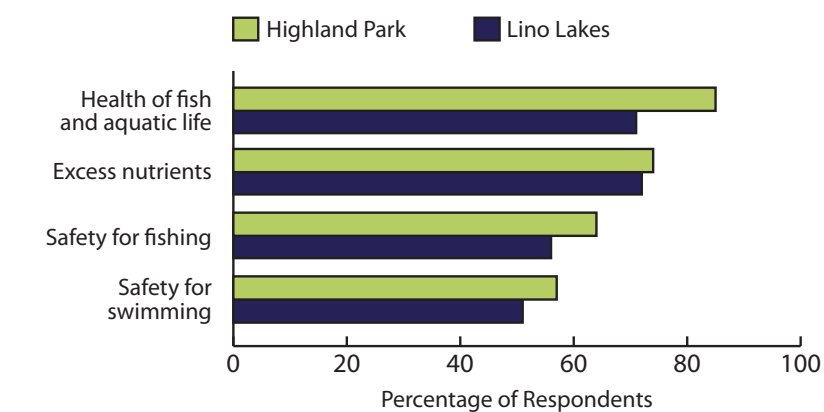
Rain gardens can absorb and filter large amounts of water.



**But, streets and storm drains connect your yard to nearby water bodies.** When grass clippings, eroded soil, or fertilizers enter storm drains or ditches, the nutrients they contain can flow to nearby lakes, streams, and rivers, accelerating algae growth. This algae growth can harm aquatic life, and it causes a bad smell and poor recreation conditions.



## Respondents expressed concerns about the quality of water bodies near their homes:



- 89% of people at least sometimes sweep **lawn clippings** off their sidewalk, driveway, or street.
  - 44% of people who fertilize their lawns sweep **fertilizer** from the pavement.
- This keeps nutrients out of nearby water bodies.



# AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT YARD CARE DECISIONS

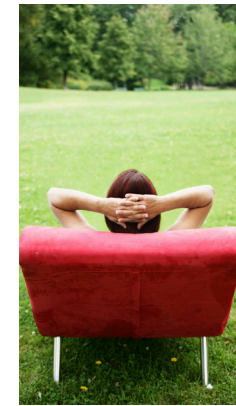
We also invited survey respondents to exchange information and ideas about lawn and yard care over the summer. A subset of survey respondents from Highland Park and Lino Lakes participated in discussions and mailings about yard care choices.

**Participants considered their desired lawn qualities and functions along this continuum:**

### Exceptional Lawn Quality:

Grow an attractive and well-kept green lawn through the optimal use of fertilizer, mowing, and water.

- ▶ *These lawns have high wear tolerance and need lots of sun. They also require frequent attention and care.*



### Low Input Lawn:

Maintain a healthy lawn with less time, fertilizer, mowing, and water. Save money and reduce inputs. Spend your summer doing other things you enjoy.

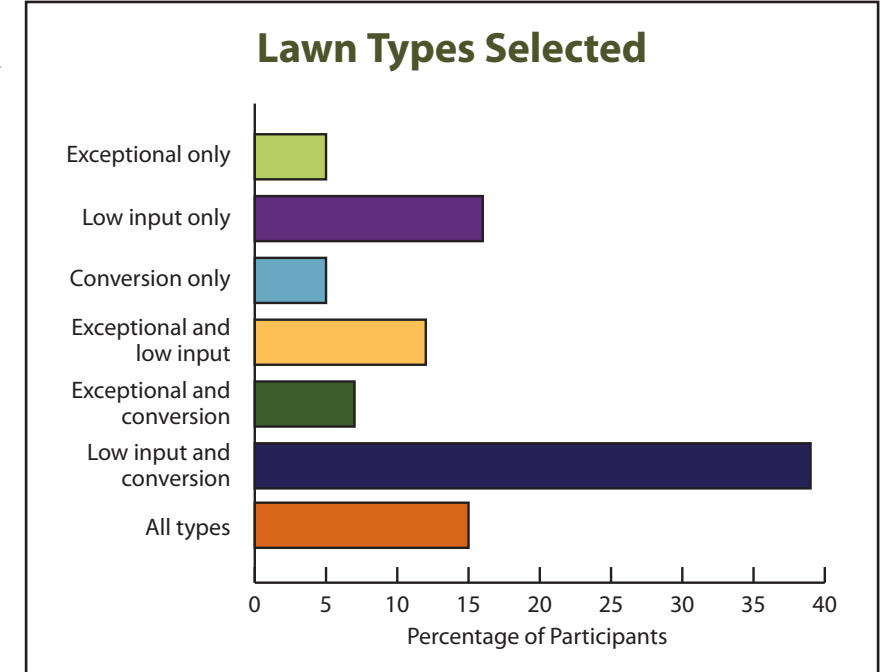
- ▶ *These lawns have lower wear tolerance and can tolerate some shade. Once established, they require little attention.*



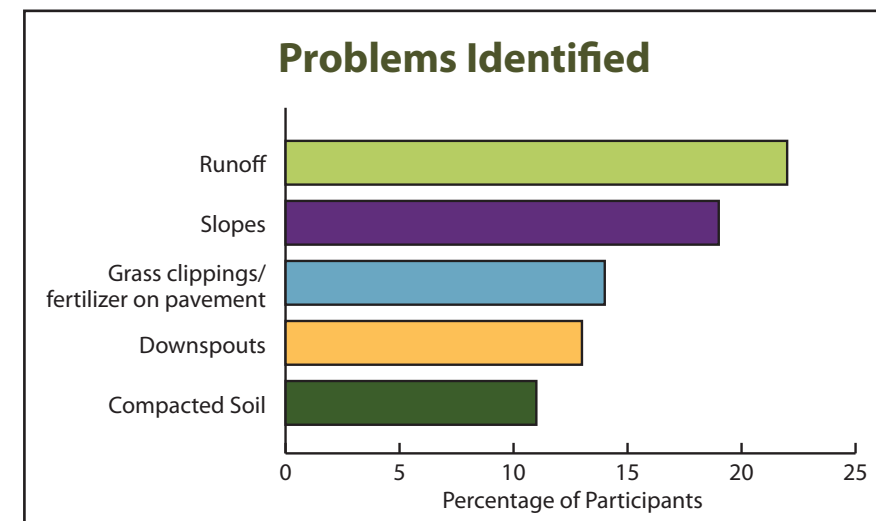
### Conversion of part or all of your lawn:

Create wildlife habitat, an edible landscape, a rain garden. Imagine an ecosystem in your yard.

- ▶ *Prairie plantings and rain gardens thrive in sun and woodland plants thrive in shaded areas. They can take time to establish and maintain.*



Participants also considered ways to keep nutrients, water, and soil in their yards. This helps improve water quality and support the lawn and yard you want at the same time.



### Strategies participants decided to try:

- Plant more vegetation around problem areas to capture water and hold soil in place.
- Direct downspouts towards vegetation that can absorb rainwater and prevent runoff.
- Start—or continue—sweeping lawn clippings and fertilizer that fall on streets and driveways back onto the lawn, where grass (instead of algae) can use the nutrients they contain.