

You Care about Yard Care!



Summary of Homeowners' Survey on Lawn Care Practices

Many of our members recently took part in an online survey about their yard care practices. Out of 2,500 surveys distributed to homeowners*, nearly 600 people responded, for an impressive 23% return. *Thanks to all who took the time to answer those thought-provoking questions.*

We shared the homeowners' survey with about 165 yard care professionals on February 12th at *Go Green to Get Green*, a workshop organized by Friends of Casco Bay, Cumberland County Cooperative Extension, and Maine Board of Pesticides Control through a small grant from the Northeastern Integrated Pest Management Center. The day-long program was attended by horticulturists, pesticide applicators, garden center employees, and golf course managers. The homeowner survey helped launch a dialogue about how lawn care professionals can better serve Maine residents.

The yard care providers were most interested in the fact that a quarter of the respondents currently use a yard care service, primarily for mowing, fertilizing, and weed and insect control. Many also said they needed help from landscapers with pruning, planting, and hardscaping, that is, building walls and walkways.

Nearly 90% of homeowners placed a high value on the natural environment around them. There were many different responses from the 577 people who answered the question, *What do you see as the biggest threat to the natural environment around your home.* Most, though, didn't seem to think that negative impacts on the environment came from themselves, citing instead, neighbors using pesticides, neighbors cutting down trees, development, runoff, road salt, deer, and "my husband."

When asked to define "low impact lawn and yard care," the answers were almost evenly divided among choices such as, *fertilizing only when a soil test indicates need to no synthetic fertilizers or pesticides to no products used that negatively affect the environment.* The answers showed that more education is needed to clarify what "ecological" lawn care really means. (That is a matter of heated discussion even among advocates of natural lawn care!).

The *Go Green to Get Green* workshop participants themselves were surveyed about their lawn care practices. The results of both surveys will be helpful as we start to develop standards for professional Maine yard care providers for “ecological lawn care.” A number of workshop participants volunteered to serve on a committee that will discuss how rigorous the standards should be, what organization might oversee the program, and how a list of “approved” practitioners will be compiled. The goal is to establish a set of standards that landscapers will agree to follow, so that Friends of Casco Bay can feel confident recommending them to consumers seeking environmentally responsible lawn care service providers.

Dr. Richard J. Brzozowski with University of Maine Cooperative Extension recruited most of the speakers for the professionals’ workshop. He said afterwards, “I think the large number of lawn care and landscape professionals that attended the day-long training is a reflection that organic or natural lawn care is an important issue to them and their customers. The program that we designed and offered seem to be just right in relation to topic and timing.”

* The homeowners’ surveys were distributed to Cooperative Extension mailing lists, southern Maine Master Gardeners, and email addresses supplied by Friends of Casco Bay and Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District. Although these lists may target people who may be inclined to place a high value on the environment, a different survey conducted by the Cumberland County Soil & Water Conservation District found that a broad spectrum of their respondents had similar concerns and practices.

To see all homeowners’ survey results, go to

http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=NHi30uAsWjzbz9fcED5M2WmbRfOcMh_2fTRRjp8pj4ABjM_3d.

Once the landscapers’ surveys are compiled, we will post a summary of their responses as well.