



Casco Bay Begins in Your Backyard

A Bay Paper from Friends of Casco Bay



Friends of Casco Bay
Casco BAYKEEPER

You can have an immediate, positive impact on the health of our coastal waters if you stop using fertilizers and pesticides.

Pesticides are getting into Casco Bay.

Friends of Casco Bay has detected pesticides in stormwater running into Casco Bay in 13 coastal communities. Some samples were found to have levels of pesticides that the EPA has determined can harm fish and other aquatic life. We also helped Maine Board of Pesticides Control collect Casco Bay sediments to test for pesticides. Analyses found bifenthrin, sumithrin, and permethrin, all pyrethroids shown to be toxic to fish and aquatic invertebrates, including lobsters.

Our lawn fertilizers are over-fertilizing the Bay.

Friends of Casco Bay found excess nitrogen in more than 50 places we sampled around Casco Bay. Nitrogen, a component of fertilizers, can stimulate the growth of nuisance and harmful algal blooms. Nuisance blooms can coat coves in green slime and smother sealife. Harmful blooms can make oysters, clams, and other shellfish toxic to eat. As algal blooms die and decay, carbon dioxide is released, causing coastal acidification and changing the chemistry of our waters, making it harder for clams and mussels to build their shells.



How does a chemical-free lawn benefit you?

Protects the health of Casco Bay.

Reduces health risks to your kids and pets. Pesticides increase the risk of cancer and asthma in children. Pesticides poison dogs and increase their risk of cancer. Pesticides and fertilizers can contaminate drinking water.

Saves money, maintenance, and the environment. Think about how much lawn you actually use and consider replacing high-maintenance turf grass with native plants or permeable pavement.



Builds soil health. Healthy soils matter. They are crucial to vibrant ecosystems and plant life and mitigate climate change by storing carbon (carbon sequestration) and slowing erosion. Pesticides and fertilizers can kill off beneficial fungi and soil organisms, making grass susceptible to pests and diseases.

Protects birds, bees, butterflies, and other beneficial insects. Bees are dying from pesticides; we need them to pollinate our flowers and food crops.

What can you do? BayScape!

Friends of Casco Bay launched BayScaping to help residents grow green lawns that keep Casco Bay blue. The BayScaping tips below can help you build a robust lawn and protect the health of your community — naturally.

Don't treat your soil like dirt.

- Healthy soils reduce opportunities for pests to invade lawns.
- Aerate your lawn in spring and/or fall to loosen the soil so air, water, and nutrients can reach roots.
- Consider spreading a very thin layer of compost in the fall.

Mowing

- Sharpen mower blades for a clean cut, to reduce water loss and ward off fungal infections.
- Set mower blades to cut grass at the highest setting. Mow regularly to keep grass at 3½ to 4 inches. Taller grass provides more leaf for photosynthesis, develops deeper roots, resists weeds, and needs less watering.
- Leave your grass clippings, nature's fertilizers.
- Vary your mowing pattern to prevent soil compaction.
- Cut the lawn shorter (2-3 inches) just before winter to reduce the risk of snow mold.

Watering

- Limit runoff of water from your yard with buffer plantings and rain gardens. Collect water in a rain barrel for watering the lawn.
- Lawns need 1 to 1.5 inches of water a week in the growing season. Much of that can come from rainfall, measured by a putting out a rain gauge or a small empty can to collect the rain.
- If you decide to water, limit yourself to once or twice a week, in early morning. Too frequent watering encourages shallow, less healthy roots.

Controlling pests

- Pull weeds in spring by hand when roots are short and soil is moist.
- Pick off bugs by hand. Knock Japanese beetles into a jar of soapy water.
- Prune overhanging tree limbs for better sunlight and air flow for the grass below.
- Learn about ordinances in your community that regulate the use of pesticides and fertilizers. See below.

Get advice!

Go to cascobay.org/bayscaping



Support a municipal ordinance to regulate or ban pesticides and fertilizers.

Maine is one of only 7 states, along with Washington, DC, where municipalities still can regulate pesticides. Two dozen Maine communities have passed ordinances controlling or banning the use of pesticides. [A list of ordinances](#) in Maine communities can be found on the State of Maine website.

Friends of Casco Bay's mission is to improve and protect the environmental health of Casco Bay. Home to the Casco **BAYKEEPER**®, we are a founding member of the international **WATERKEEPER**® ALLIANCE.

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