Natural Yard Care Made Easy
Conservation Corner – April 2020
By the Conservation and Climate Outreach Commission

American lawns consume the most herbicides and TV ads tout their safety, but the World Health organization released studies on the human health dangers of Round Up, or glyphosate, and 2,4-D (in weed & feed type fertilizers) labeling them as "possible carcinogens and hormone disrupters". Vietnam vets exposed to Agent Orange containing 2,4-D, experienced severe reproductive disorders, so these chemicals really are dangerous for men, pregnant women, and children. Many countries have banned them and back in 2016 Ashland Parks & Recreation drastically reduced their use of herbicides and our local Ashland ACE Hardware store replaced some high-hazard pesticides with safer, natural products. You can still have hearty grass without these chemicals, but the City also has a lawn replacement program (ashland.or.us/LRP) to switch to a climate appropriate, low water use landscape.

Healthy soil is critical in creating healthier plants, which are also better at resisting drought, disease, and pests. Top-dressing your lawn with an inch of compost feeds those roots actual food instead of just "chemical vitamins". Grass, flowers, and vegetables will all benefit from real food versus harmful products promising a perfect lawn or garden. Consider letting go of perfection, in order to protect our families' health, pets, and waterways. *Before* TV promoted perfect lawns resembling golf courses, "turf" was a bio-diverse mix of grasses, clover, English daisies, and moss. Top-dressing with compost, then raking in wildflower seeds, fescue, or rye grass will also reduce disease and watering time, while attracting precious pollinators. Now you can buy drought-tolerant seed mixes with similar diversity, and they look great too. If heavier fertilizing seems necessary, buy organic, slow release brands that don't hurt salmon with polluted run-off. A more complete list of natural gardening tips includes: aerating, smart watering, mulch mowing, and over-seeding, so check out this great website for more details: www.oregonmetro.gov/tools-living/yard-and-garden/lawn.

Weeds: Avoid "weed & feed" and other industrial herbicides, because kids, pets, the birds, and the bees are especially vulnerable to chemical exposure. Many weeds indicate soil conditions, so encouraging a bio-diverse lawn with a few weeds - especially chickweed, English daisy, and clover, which helps grass by fixing nitrogen. Dense planting and over-seeding leaves less room for pesky weeds, so anything you can mow to a height of three inches *could be* considered part of a healthy lawn. For severe weed problems, use manual removal instead of herbicides. Invest in tools like a hori hori, weed pullers, hoes, or a weed wrench. Digging out roots is always the best strategy, but re-seed those areas so the grass keeps winning. Boiling water makes pulling much easier, but if removal is still too hard, hire neighborhood kids or spot spray with natural herbicides like plain old white vinegar, or acetic acid. Remember that proper mulching (cardboard, bark, straw, wood chips) suppresses weeds, covers the soil, and helps gardens retain water. Propane weed burners, steam weeders, and infrared torches effectively kill weeds in gravel or concrete driveways by burning to the root.

Bugs: Predator bugs help by eating pesky ones, so wiping out all insects is counter-productive to healthy landscapes. Most people detest white flies and squash bugs, but with garden pests, a little perspective change can go a long way. Try accepting low levels of damage because most healthy plants can survive 25 percent loss, and with healthy soil, many outgrow pests, or diseases. Encourage predators with birdhouses, birdbaths, or planting millet and other seed crops to attract birds and other allies. Purchase predator bugs, (lacewings, bumble bees, lady bugs, praying mantis); encourage them by planting nectar and pollen plants like sunflowers, cosmos or flowering herbs. Pull off infested plant parts, and pick and squish, or Google recipes for making natural pesticides. Explore the metro website above for details on specific pests and diseases. Ashland City website has more great information too: www.ashlandsaveswater.org/.

Equipment: Ashland Hardware will be holding an Electric Landscaping Equipment Demo Day on Saturday, April 25 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. The Demo Day will allow for customers to test out the electric landscaping tools available and talk with Ashland Hardware about their use and advantages. The Conservation and Climate Outreach Commission will also have a few representatives on hand to talk about the City of Ashland's Conservation programs.