

Green Notes: News, Reviews and Updates from First UMC's Green Team

How Green Is My Yard ... Or Not?

One of the surest signs of late spring in Missoula is the sound of lawn mowers, manicuring newly green lawns to our – or our neighbors' – expectations.

But should we cultivate uber-green lawns in a climate that provides just 14 inches of rain each year? What if our yards followed the natural course we see on the hillsides of mounts Sentinel and Jumbo – green for a few weeks or a month, then taking their cues (and colors) from the seasons?

There's [a movement](#) afoot across the United States to encourage yards filled not with intensively mown, weed-free, fertilized grass but with native plants – the species naturally found in an area, from perennial wildflowers to berry bushes to big, majestic trees.

Margaret Renkl recently wrote an [op-ed for the New York Times](#), advocating the “re-wilding” of residential yards, but also assuring readers that the process needn't be immediate or overwhelming.

“I wonder if more people don't try to do better by the environment because they think doing better is too hard, too impractical, too expensive,” she wrote. “In truth ... making a difference can be as easy as learning to love clover and dandelions.”

Renkl's own yard has progressed from artificially green grass to native trees, flowers, grasses and shrubs one patch at a time. “It's very much a work in progress,” she wrote. Her inspiration came from [Douglas Tallamy](#), a University of Delaware professor, author of “Bringing Nature Home” and “Nature's Best Hope,” and one of

the botanists behind the National Wildlife Federation's [online native plant finder](#). Type in your zip code and the site provides dozens of suggested flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs native to your area.

“You aren’t obliged to turn your yard into a meadow,” Renkl wrote. “All you need to do is stop spraying for weeds. Stop spraying for insects. When you’re choosing new trees and shrubs, or even just window box flowers, take a moment to look up the native options that are just as pretty as the non-native ones now in style. If you can set up a nest box for birds, and keep clean water available for all the thirsty creatures, that will help too.

“You needn’t do it all, and certainly you needn’t do it all at once. But if you do even one of these things, the natural world will reward you so profusely with butterflies and bees and bright-winged songbirds that I bet you’ll decide it’s only the first step.”

What have you done to encourage native species in your yard? Share your ideas with First Church’s congregation by emailing Sherry Devlin at sherrydevlin@gmail.com. We’ll feature your thoughts in an upcoming Green Notes column!