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Environmental Benefits of Turfgrass

CARBON RETENTION

“Lawn areas in the U.S. could store up to 37 billion pounds of carbon.”

- Source: Cristina Milesi, NASA Ames Research Center - 2008

Lush lawns throughout the U.S. turn out to be a "sink" for carbon dioxide, pulling the greenhouse gas out of the atmosphere as they grow. The effect is more pronounced when grass clippings are left to decompose in place, boosting growth by providing nitrogen.

In a study conducted by Cristina Milesi, Ph.D., a NASA research scientist and reported in the journal of Environmental Management, it is suggested that some 40 million acres of America are covered in lawns, making turfgrass our largest irrigated crop.

All told, Milesi estimates, "2 percent of the U.S. land surface that is covered in lawns could account for about 5 percent of the carbon dioxide absorbed by all plants. She also suggests that lawn areas in the U.S. could store up to 37 billion pounds of carbon.

David Elstein, writing for the Agricultural Research Service reports that a study conducted by ARS and Colorado State University of golf courses estimated that “nearly a ton of carbon per acre is stored in the soil of fairways and greens”.

So the next time you’re walking across your lawn, strolling through a park, enjoying a day at the ballpark or watching youngsters play on grass, take a look at what's under their

(MORE)

feet. Among the many other environmental benefits of turfgrass, it also helps to rid the atmosphere of carbon dioxide by capturing CO^2 through photosynthesis and sequestering some of it in the soil.

NOTE: Dr. Cristina Milesi report, *"Mapping and Modeling the Biogeochemical Cycling of Turf Grasses in the United States"* was featured in Volume 36, Number 3, September 2005 in the journal of Environmental Management. Information regarding the ARS study can be obtained by visiting www.nps.ars.usda.gov. ARS National Program #204.

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