

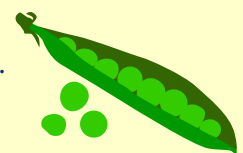


## TAKING ACTION FOR SOIL

Soil issues affect us all in some way. Because of that, there are many ways that each of us can help in solving the problem. Actions we take can range from simple consumer choices to a more active role in community decision making to more responsible activities at the workplace. Read on for a list of 17 actions and choices that you can take personally to help.



-  1. Leave grass cuttings on the lawn. Cuttings serve as a moisture-retentive mulch and a natural fertilizer, and recycling them will reduce the load in landfills.
2. Cover your soil with a layer of mulch to prevent soil erosion and to conserve soil moisture. Mulch can be anything from grass clippings or bark chips to stones or newspaper.
3. If you plan to plant on a steep slope in your yard, avoid soil erosion by terracing your yard. Mini-gardens built in a sloping area of your yard, terraces help slow the water running downhill so it can soak into the soil rather than carry the soil away.
4. Prevent soil erosion in your yard by raking your leaves rather than using a leaf blower. Not only do leaf blowers contribute to noise pollution and waste fossil fuels, but also they degrade topsoil. Instead, try raking the leaves yourself. It will improve your health and that of your soil, too!
5. Help prevent soil erosion in your community by planting trees and ground-covering plants that help hold the soil in place. Steep slopes, roadsides, and river banks are especially susceptible to erosion. You might organize a group of citizens to identify places that need planting, raise funds and solicit donations of materials, work with your local government to plant the trees and plants, and maintain them over the long term.
6. If your workplace is surrounded by landscaping or open space, evaluate how well the soil is being conserved. Look for places where soil can run off, like on unplanted steep slopes or stream banks, or where soil is exposed rather than covered with mulch. Also, find out if toxic pesticides are being used. If you find places where the soil can be improved, talk with your employer about how you think they can make improvements.
7. Add organic matter to enrich your garden soil. Compost from kitchen scraps and manure from poultry, cows, or horses are good sources, but be sure manure is not too fresh and that you don't use too much. Healthy soil grows healthy plants, and it lessens the need for insecticides and herbicides.
8. In your vegetable garden, rotate crops to prevent the depletion of nutrients. Legumes such as peas and beans put nitrogen back into the soil.



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9. Set up a compost pile in your yard so you can enrich your soil with the organic waste from your kitchen rather than use up landfill space. While kitchen scraps, leaves, and grass clippings make excellent compost, they also make up about 25 percent of the waste in landfills and incinerators.
10. If you'd rather not compost your yard waste at home, consider taking it to a central location in your community where compost is made on a large scale. Contact your department of public works to find out if such facilities exist in your area. Not only might you be able to take grass clippings to the facility, but also you might be able to use some of the finished compost for your yard.
11. Set up a compost pile to help your school or workplace enrich its soil and cut down on the amount of waste it sends to the landfill. Set up buckets in your lunchroom or office where fruit and vegetable waste can be put, empty the buckets daily onto a compost pile, and use the rich compost to enrich your soil around the school or office building. Search online under "compost" for tips on composting.
12. Learn more about composting by bringing worms into your classroom. In vermicomposting, a special kind of earthworm called a red wiggler breaks down vegetable wastes. Vermicomposting uses less space than traditional composting, so you can do it in your classroom. Once you learn how it works, you can try a variety of experiments to learn more about composting.
13. Encourage your local zoo, farms, and other organizations or people that house a large number of animals to provide your community with compost made from animal manure. Animal manure can be composted to make a rich fertilizer, and it can be an additional source of income for the animal owners. 
14. Avoid the use of toxic pesticides in your garden—they often kill the beneficial organisms your soil needs to stay healthy. To control snails, slugs, and ants in your garden, set up a barrier around your plants with diatomaceous earth (soil that contains the shells of diatoms) or set out beer in shallow dishes to drown the pests.
15. Buy organically grown produce to help reduce the amount of toxic pesticides that harm soil organisms. Pesticides not only kill pests, but also often kill beneficial soil organisms that help keep soil healthy. Look for organically grown produce in your grocery store, or try growing some yourself if you have the space.
16. Encourage your school or employer to cut down on pesticide use on the grounds around your workplace. Pesticides not only kill pests, but also often kill beneficial soil organisms that help keep soil healthy.
17. Support "smart growth" campaigns in your state and community. Cutting down on irresponsible development can protect soil, biodiversity, and our quality of life.



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