



# Earth Day in Washington, CT

April 22, 2024

Brought to you by the Sustainability Committee

## Dear Washington Residents,

The Sustainability Committee is excited to provide you with this newsletter detailing some of the work we have done over the past five years. The Committee's only goal is to help the town meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. We look at all aspects of town governance to determine how we can improve the way we do things so they are sustainable.

Given the fact that the Committee can only make recommendations, everyone involved with the town must understand the importance of sustainability. Whether it involves how we salt our roads, handle our waste, address affordable housing, or improve town buildings and properties, everyone must buy into the goal of being a sustainable town. Jim Brinton, our First Selectman, has been instrumental in making sure everyone understands the importance of leaving the town in better shape than we found it.

We want to thank all the departments, boards, and commissions who have made sustainability a part of the actions they take. Without their support, little could be accomplished. We would like to recognize

the town's Economic and Community Development Director, Michelle Gorra. Michelle provides the Committee with support and most importantly, enthusiasm. Without her, we would never have been able to accomplish what we have so far.

The town of Washington has been certified by Sustainable CT as a Sustainable Community with Bronze status. The Committee is proud to have demonstrated the actions the town has taken to achieve this designation. To learn more about this achievement visit: [SustainableCT.org](https://SustainableCT.org)

In the following articles, we've provided you with tools and resources that you can use in your homes and on your properties to make your actions more sustainable. To make Washington a truly sustainable community, we need you to take action.



The Sustainability Committee meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 p.m. in Town Hall. You are welcome to join us in person or virtually. We are always looking for new ideas and new members. If you have some thoughts or suggestions, please come to a meeting or use the town's website to send us an email.

Washington is a great place to live and work. We hope you will work with us to ensure that it remains that way.

Sincerely,

Committee members:

Jay Hubelbank, Chair  
Monique Gil-Rogers

Brian Hagenbuch  
Hugh Rogers

Amy Dyer  
Carole Matteo

Chris Charles

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## CLOSING THE LOOP:

### Why Buying Recycled Products Matters

In the quest for a greener, more sustainable world, every action counts. One crucial step towards achieving this vision is buying products made from recycled materials. It's not just about reducing waste; it's about closing the loop of sustainability.



The key to a thriving recycling ecosystem lies in maintaining a steady demand for recycled materials. Without this demand, there's no incentive for recycling products to continue. It's a simple equation: no demand, no recycling economy. By choosing recycled products, we ensure that there's a market for recyclables, thereby supporting the entire

recycling infrastructure. There are many common products we can purchase from bath tissue and napkins made from recycled paper to chairs and clothes made from recycled plastic.

Beyond its environmental significance, buying recycled products has profound economic

implications. A robust market for recycled materials creates jobs, stimulates economic growth, and fosters innovation in recycling technology. Without it, we risk stalling progress towards a circular economy where resources are reused and repurposed, rather than discarded after single use.



Stable markets for recycled materials are essential for recycling programs everywhere. When there's a demand for recyclables, municipalities are more inclined to invest in comprehensive recycling infrastructure. This leads to increased recycling rates, reduced waste in landfills, and ultimately, a cleaner, healthier environment for all.



As consumers, we hold immense power to drive change through our purchasing decisions. By choosing recycled products, we not only support sustainability but also exert pressure on businesses to adopt more environmentally friendly practices. It's a simple yet effective way to make a difference in the world.



WASHINGTON ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

## Celebration at Judy Black Park April 20, 10am – 2pm

Please join us on April 20 for an Earth Day celebration at Judy Black Park and Memorial Gardens.

## Annual Roadside Cleanup Event

Please sign up online at [www.wec-ct.org/earth-day-roadside-cleanup](http://www.wec-ct.org/earth-day-roadside-cleanup). Trash bags will be available for pickup at Washington Town Hall and a dumpster will be out in front for receiving the collected trash from April 18 – 21, 2024.

Thank you for your commitment to keeping Washington BEAUTIFUL!

# The Benefits of Mulching Leaves and Grass Clippings

Put those rakes away, it's time to mulch your leaves! In the fall there are many things around your property to get done before winter. Raking and bagging leaves for hours on end should not be one of them. Almost every lawn mower can mulch leaves. Most mowers come with an attachment to aid in the mulching process, however, if you do not have a mulching attachment you can still use your mower without it. Simply elevate your mower deck to its highest setting, remove the grass catcher, go over the leaves that are lying on top of the lawn multiple times with your mower, shredding them into small pieces. Mower mulching works best when the leaves are dry.

These smaller pieces will filter down between the grass blades to the soil surface. Eventually micro-organisms and worms will aid in breaking down the leaves. This process will not add to the thatch layer of the lawn and the decomposition of leaves will provide nutrients back into the soil.

## When to Mulch Leaves

You should mulch the leaves weekly; weekly mulching will help make the mulching process quicker and this gives you more time with your family and friends and all the while, your lawn benefits from the nutrients it's receiving from the leaves you simply mowed.

By mulching, you reduce your lawn's fertilizer needs. Mulching re-introduces essential minerals to your lawn that

would otherwise be lost. For example, nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are all preserved by utilizing the mulch, reducing the need for artificial fertilizers to keep your lawn looking healthy.

Leaving the mulch in your lawn returns several pounds of nutrients to your lawn each season.

That's a considerable amount when typical recommendations suggest two to five pounds of actual nitrogen per

Lawn Clipping Nutrients	
Type of nutrient	Amount mowed off in one growing season (per 1,000 square feet)
Nitrogen	4.8 pounds
Phosphorous	0.7 pounds
Potassium	2.6 pounds

Sources: The Lawn Institute, James B. Beard, "Turfgrass: Science and Culture"

1,000 square feet of lawn annually. Lawn clipping mulch allows you to skip the time and expense of a nitrogen fertilizer cycle while still maintaining a healthy lawn.

Mulching lawn clippings also helps lawns stay hydrated in high heat and drought conditions.



## Salt in our Water?

As you know, road salt application helps keep our roads safe in winter. But the sodium chloride from it leaches through our soils into our surface waters and private wells. It's important to keep this to a minimum, as it can harm our waters and our health. Excessive salt intake aggravates chronic congestive heart failure and raises blood pressure. Drinking water may contain 10% of a person's total sodium intake. For persons on a restricted salt diet, drinking water may contain as much as 64% of their total sodium intake. Elevated levels of salt in surface water increase heavy metal contamination and are toxic to fish and other aquatic life. One teaspoon of salt contaminates five gallons of water.

Some towns in our area have programs in place to monitor the levels of sodium in streams and wells, and the Sustainability Committee has researched and implemented such a



monitoring program. Eight times a year, five tributaries of the Shepaug River will be tested for sodium levels, recorded, and posted on the SaltWatch website, [www.iwla.org/water/stream-monitoring/salt-watch](http://www.iwla.org/water/stream-monitoring/salt-watch). This data will show the impact of our road salt use.

We've also arranged to have York Labs, of Newtown, test private well samples for residents at a discounted price of \$90.10. On Saturday, April 20, at the town's Earth Day Celebration, a York Lab representative will distribute sample bottles for residents to take home, fill with water from their tap, and return to the York representative with payment by early afternoon of that day. These samples will be tested for about fifteen different elements including E. Coli., pH, and sodium at the York Lab. The results will be emailed to each resident. We recommend that all residents with private wells have them tested regularly.

# Energy Efficiency in the Ambulance Building Renovations

The Sustainability Committee, in coordination with the Ambulance Building Committee, is working to ensure that the renovations of the Ambulance Building focus on constructing a building that is as energy efficient as possible. The architects have been directed to incorporate energy-efficient construction and equipment into the renovation plans for the building. We know that spending money now will save the town in the future.



While our goal is to make the building Net Zero, we understand that renovating a building is much different than new construction. We believe it is possible to construct a renovated building and ensure that is very energy-efficient.

As of today, the plans call for new windows, additional insulation, and the use of radiant heat in the ambulance bays. It also calls for the replacement of the HVAC equipment, Energy



**AMBULANCE HEADQUARTERS**  
92 Bee Brook Road  
Washington Depot

Star appliances, automation of all systems, new LED lighting fixtures, and a storm water utility program to improve water quality prior to water entering the roadside catch basins.

The two Committees will continue to work together as the plans are finalized.

## NEW RECYCLING OPPORTUNITY: Plastic Bag Collection

Have you ever wished you could find a convenient place to recycle all your plastic bags? Beginning on April 15 we are partnering with Big Y and the Trek Company to collect and recycle most of the plastic bags we currently do not accept at our recycle center. Below is a list of the types of bags you will be able to recycle. Containers to collect the bags can be found at the Transfer Station and in Town Hall. Recycled bags will be

brought to Big Y and then delivered to the Trek Company which will use them to make their various products.

Should the town collect 1,000 pounds in a year, we will win a Trek Bench for use outside.

This a great opportunity for residents to recycle items not ordinarily recycled and to reduce the amount of trash the Town must transport to incinerators.



If our town collects 1,000 pounds in a year, we can win this Trek Bench.

**What can be recycled?** All plastic must be clean, dry and, free of food residue.



# Creating Pollinator-Friendly Outdoor Spaces Without Harming the Environment

As homeowners in Washington, we can encourage pollinator populations. When cultivating pollinator-friendly gardens and outdoor spaces, we must be mindful of the plants that we choose to cultivate and think twice about using chemicals. Your outdoor spaces can have a positive effect on our ecosystem, especially as it pertains to pollinators.

## Why Pollinators Matter

Pollinators such as bees, butterflies, and birds are essential for ecosystem health and food production, making them invaluable to our gardens and environment.

## Creating Pollinator Pathways at Home

- "Go Native": Select native flowers, shrubs, and trees to attract local pollinators adapted to our specific climate and soil conditions.
- "Think Diversity": Include a variety of plant species with different shapes, sizes, and bloom times to support a wide range of pollinators throughout the year to avoid "food deserts" for pollinators.



## Rethink the Use of Chemicals

- Identify problematic weeds and consider alternative control methods like hand weeding or improving soil health.

- Choose only products labeled as safe for pollinators and apply them sparingly and selectively. Avoid products like "Round-Up" containing glyphosates that indiscriminately eliminate flowering plants along pollinator routes, depriving them of vital food sources.

Residual effects and drift further diminish suitable habitats for pollinators.

- Neonicotinoids and other harmful pesticides harm bees and other



pollinators, disrupting their behavior and reproductive success. Pesticide residues in nectar and pollen contribute to colony collapse disorder and long-term population decline.

- Fertilizers can lead to nutrient imbalances in plants, affecting the composition and availability of nectar and pollen for pollinators.

**Act Now:** Support local pollinator conservation initiatives and encourage the adoption of pollinator-friendly policies now.

Learn more about Washington's local Pollinator Pathways here: [www.pollinator-pathway.org/towns/washington](http://www.pollinator-pathway.org/towns/washington)



Town of Washington's  
Sustainability Committee  
Conservation Commission  
Economic & Community Development

## Working Together for a Sustainable Washington



**Washington Environmental Council**

# Updates at the Transfer Station



Michael Bowman Photography.

The Transfer Station, located on Clark Road, is open Mon, Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat: 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., CLOSED Thursday and Sunday.

If you haven't been to the Transfer Station in a while, you may not be aware of the changes we have made to make it safer and more efficient. The new traffic flow at the site eliminates crossing traffic and allows residents to safely drop off their waste and recyclables. Please review the map to see how the site has changed.

## Why Separate Our Glass Recycling?

Did you know that only 25% of all recyclable materials we transport to the Murphy Road Recycling Center are actually recycled? It turns out that most of the materials are contaminated and can't be reused. Glass accounts for approximately 30% of all recycled materials. By breaking out glass from other recyclable materials, we reduce the cost of hauling away our recycling. By collecting glass separately, we can guarantee that 100% is being reused. We have an agreement with a company in Beacon Falls to take our recycled glass at no cost to us. They use all the glass as part of their concrete product.

This year from July through February the town of Washington collected over 27 tons of glass.

You can bring your glass to the Transfer Station and deposit it in the glass container. Please remove the screwtops and corks. Unfortunately, there are no haulers in our area that will pick up glass separately at the curbside. The Town will continue to offer single-stream recycling at the curbside although we encourage residents to bring their glass bottles to the Transfer Station.



# Material Solid Waste (MSW) AKA Garbage

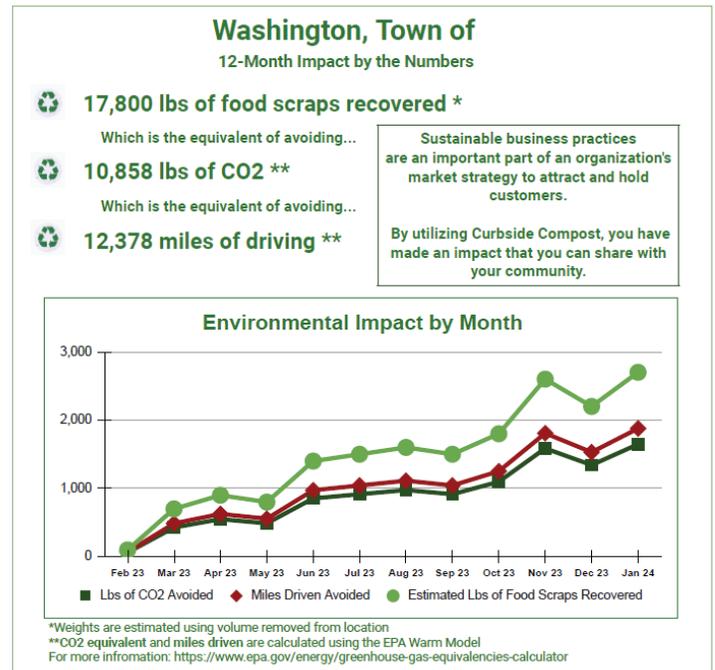
Washington has been working hard to reduce the amount of material solid waste (MSW), otherwise known as garbage, that we ship to the incinerator in Bristol. A big part of that effort is to recycle more of the waste we currently throw in the trash. Working with the Sustainability Committee, we have added several recycling options in addition to the items we have always accepted including:

- food waste
- books
- plastic of all kinds
- textiles
- used clothing
- mattresses
- electronic waste
- tires and batteries
- appliances
- fire extinguishers

We also collect construction material, limited to a pickup truck amount, as well as metal. Containers are located at the Transfer Station.

**Food Waste: Did you know that food waste accounts for 25% of all garbage?** By reducing the food waste we can reduce the number of times we have to truck the MSW to Bristol. Starting in January of 2023, residents can now recycle their food waste at the Transfer Station. We have contracted with Curbside Compost to pick up the collected food waste and deliver it to a composting company in New Milford. **Last year we collected 7.5 tons of food waste.**

If you haven't participated in the program, you can bring your food waste to the Transfer Station. Food waste can be placed in one of the seven containers. Waste can be brought in a compostable bag, or simply dumped from your container into



one of ours. Below is a list of the various kinds of food waste that we collect:

- fruits and vegetables
- legumes
- eggs, including shells
- tea bags
- brans, grains, nuts,
- meat, fish, bones, dairy
- coffee grounds and filters

Washington is working to build its own composting system. Our plan is to eliminate the need to have our food waste transported out of town and to make the compost available to residents at no cost.

## Invasive Plants Around Your Home

As a residential landowner and gardener, it's important to be aware of invasive plant species and prevent them from spreading and taking over your property. Invasive plants are non-native species that can outcompete and displace native plants, reduce biodiversity, and negatively impact the ecosystem. Here are some common invasive plant species to watch out for:

**Japanese Barberry** is a very common invasive shrub that quickly spreads from landscapes and gardens and forms dense thickets.



This plant is a tick magnet. While deer do not feed on it, white-footed mice thrive in barberry and tick populations may be ten times higher in barberry stands than in areas with native species. Native alternative—winterberry or chokeberry.

**Burning Bush, or winged euonymus,** is a woody shrub that prefers shade but can grow in open areas. It is easy to recognize with its bright red fall foliage and "wings" on the stems. Dense thickets outcompete native species. Native alternative—red osier dogwood or winterberry.



**Oriental Bittersweet** is a woody vine that can climb and overtake native trees, often strangling them. The weight of the



vines can also break off tree limbs. Often found along the edges of woodlands, roadsides, and old fields. Native alternative—American bittersweet.

In addition to being wary of invasive plants, you can take steps to prevent their spread.

- Avoid planting invasive species in your landscaped areas
- Dispose of any plant material carefully to prevent the spread of seeds.
- Plant native species that provide important habitat for Connecticut's wildlife and are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions.

Overall, being aware of invasive species, managing infestations, and preventing their spread is essential for maintaining a healthy and diverse ecosystem. More information can be found on Steep Rock Association's website at [www.steeprockassoc.org/invasive-task-force-resources/](http://www.steeprockassoc.org/invasive-task-force-resources/)

# Don't Mow in May to Help the Bees

We here in Washington are, for the most part, aware of our responsibility to be conscientious in making sure our environment is healthy. We certainly reside in a beautiful little part of the planet.

Spring is here and we are eagerly anticipating the reawakening of Nature around us. We need to keep being vigilant about protecting and preserving our ecosystems.

Awareness of Earth Day on April 22 has grown tremendously. It is mentioned often and everywhere.

The notion of protecting the environment is no longer a cause for the few. It is of international concern.

With all of this in mind, the Sustainability Committee will proudly support the "No Mow May" efforts. Our lawns here in Washington are beautiful. The coveted American suburban notion of having



the perfect lawn is alive and well here in Town.

The "No Mow May" initiative is not meant to undermine the long-treasured goal of having a lush green lawn. Allowing your lawn to grow for a few extra weeks will be good for the environment. Wildflowers will appear to support pollination, and seed heads will attract birds. There will be a reduction in carbon emissions due to less mowing and water demand for irrigation will decrease. Days might also be a bit more peaceful too without all the mowers running around so frequently.

"No Mow May" is a thoughtful plan. It gives us food for thought as we approach the lawn growing season. Maybe you do not want to go "all in". No problem. You can try not mowing for the first couple of weeks in May, or leave two weeks in between mowing. Less mowing during May helps provide for our pollinating insects.

Then, pick a small bouquet for that little vase you haven't used in years; watch the bees, butterflies, and birds and think "I helped."

Have a great Summer.

**NO MOW MAY**  
**Please excuse the weeds**  
**they are feeding the bees**



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