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**THE OFTEN OVER-LOOKED BENEFITS OF TURFGRASS**

**“At a time when global warming, air pollution and carbon emissions are making worldwide news; it’s important that we take a closer look at turfgrass and the many benefits it has to offer.”**

When Joni Mitchell penned the lyrics to her song, “Big Yellow Taxi” some thirty years ago, she included the memorable line - - “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” This thought-provoking lyric still attracts a listener’s attention as well it should. At a time when global warming, air pollution and carbon emissions are making worldwide news; it’s important that we take a closer look at turfgrass and the many benefits it has to offer.

Dr. James B. Beard, perhaps the world’s most respected turfgrass research scientist and turfgrass specialist and co-author of “The Role of Turfgrass in Environmental Protection” noted, “Turfgrasses have been utilized by humans to enhance their environment for more than 10 centuries. The complexity and comprehensiveness of these environmental benefits that improve our quality-of-life are just now being quantitatively documented through research.”

Dr. Beard divided the benefits of turfgrass into three categories which included; functional, recreational and aesthetic components. He reported the functional benefits included: excellent soil erosion control and dust stabilization thereby protecting a vital

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soil resource; improved recharge and quality protection of groundwater, plus flood control; enhanced entrapment and biodegradation of synthetic organic compounds; soil improvement that includes CO<sub>2</sub> conversion; accelerated restoration of disturbed soils; substantial urban heat dissipation temperature moderation; reduced noise, glare, and visual pollution problems; decreased noxious pests and allergy-related pollens; safety in vehicle operation on roadsides and engine longevity on airfields; lowered fire hazard via open green turfed firebreaks; and improved security of sensitive installations provided by high visibility zones.

The recreational benefits include a low-cost surface for outdoor sport and leisure activities, enhanced physical health of participants, and a unique low-cost cushion against personal impact injuries.

The aesthetic benefits include enhanced beauty and attractiveness; a complimentary relationship to the total landscape ecosystem of flowers, shrubs and trees; improved mental health with a positive therapeutic impact, social harmony and stability; improved work productivity; and an overall better quality-of-life, especially in densely populated urban areas.

To fully grasp the significant benefits of turfgrass one merely has to consider just a few of the many interesting facts about turfgrass that are often overlooked.

- Turfgrasses trap an estimated 12 million tons of dust and dirt released annually into the atmosphere.
- The front lawns on a block of eight average houses have a cooling effect of about 70 tons of air conditioning.
- 55 square feet of turfgrass provides enough oxygen for one person for an entire day.
- Nearly a ton of carbon per acre per year is stored in the soil of golf course fairways and greens.

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- If people recycle the grass clippings, leaving them to decompose on the lawn, the U.S. lawn area could store up to 37 billion pounds of carbon each year.
- Buffer areas of well-maintained grassy lawns around buildings are good insurance against fire.
- Typically, 1.7 times more area on a golf course is used for natural habitats and a many golf courses serve as both bird and wildlife sanctuaries.
- Grass plants are 70 to 80% water and clippings are 90% water.
- 90% of the weight of grass is in its roots.
- A 10,000 square foot lawn will contain: 6 grass plants per square inch, 850 plants per square foot, and totaling 8.5 million plants.
- Turfgrass helps purify water entering underground aquifers by its root mass and soil microbes acting as a filter to capture and breakdown many types of pollutants.
- A dense lawn is 6 times more effective than a wheat field and 4 times better than a hayfield at absorbing rainfall.
- A 50 by 50 foot turfgrass lawn (2,500 square feet) releases enough oxygen for a family of four, while absorbing carbon dioxide, hydrogen fluoride and perosyacetyte nitrate.
- The grass and trees along the U.S. interstate highway system release enough oxygen to support 22 million people.

As suggested by these interesting statistics, the benefits of turfgrass are considerable, and much like the Amazon rainforest, perhaps far too valuable to take for granted.

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