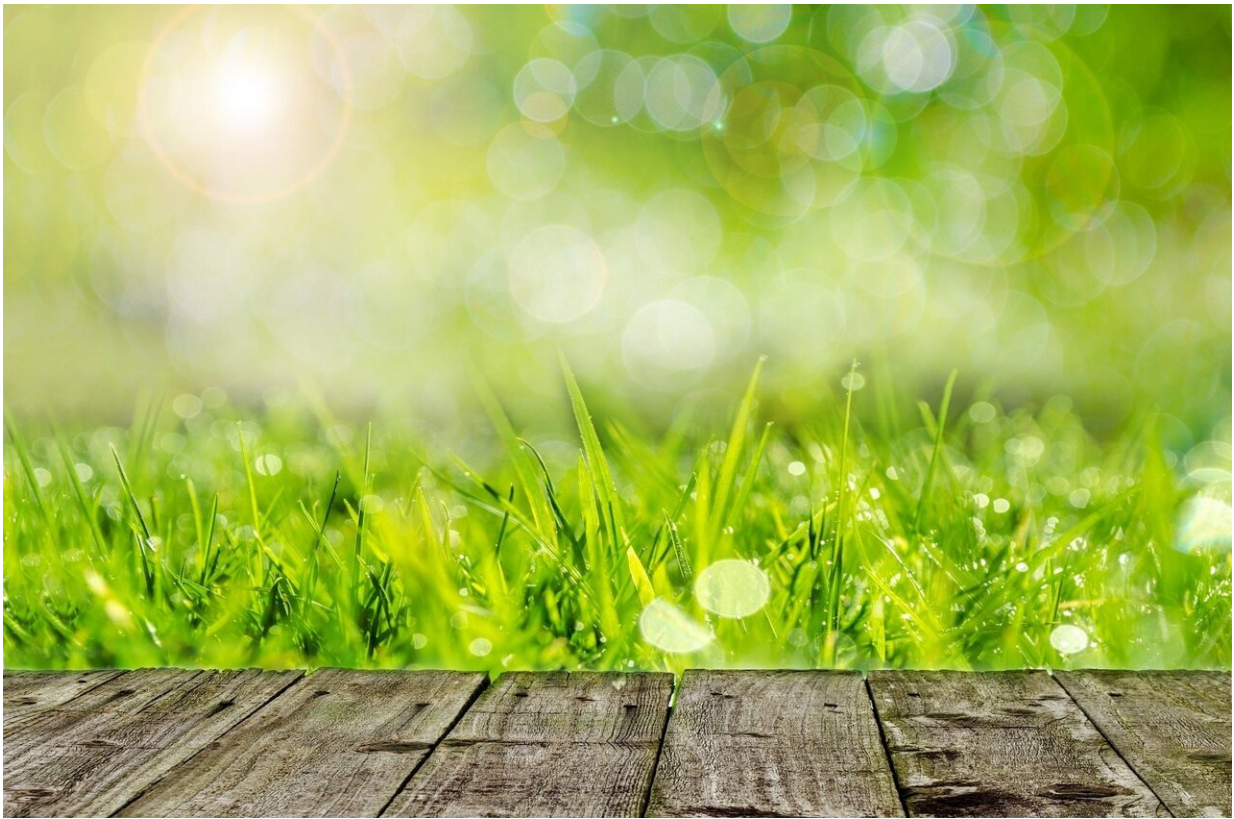


Knowing your neighbors may shape US household yard care practices

November 13 2019



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Neighbor peer pressure may be linked to increases in yard fertilization and irrigation across several distinct climate regions of the US, according to a study published November 13, 2019 in the open-access journal

PLOS ONE by Dexter Locke from the USDA Forest Service, US, and colleagues.

Household yards in the US use nearly four times as much land area as farmed corn (163,800 km²), suggesting even small changes to individual properties could lead to big environmental change. In this study, Locke and colleagues investigate the practices of yard care across the US.

In November-December 2011, the authors conducted telephone surveys of 7,317 households in six city regions covering major climatic areas of the USA: Boston, MA; Baltimore, MD; Miami, FL; Minneapolis-St Paul, MN; Phoenix, AZ; and Los Angeles, CA. Respondents were asked about using fertilizers, pesticides, and/or [irrigation water](#) on their yards, as well as their age, household income, and the number of neighbors they know by name.

Over 80 percent of respondents irrigated their yard in the last year, while 53 percent applied pesticides. Unsurprisingly, households in hot, dry climates were especially likely to water their yards. However, irrigation was also linked to higher household income, as was fertilization and pesticide use. In general, higher-income households were approximately 16-23 percent more likely to report irrigation, fertilization, and pesticide application than lower-income households, likely because of the associated costs of these practices. Households which knew more neighbors by name were also nine percent more likely to irrigate and to fertilize their lawns, and the authors suggest that [peer pressure](#) might influence yard care practices.

The yes/no telephone survey questions make specific practices (such as paying others to perform yard care) difficult to discern, and it is not possible to determine causation from the associations found. Nonetheless, this study provides initial insights about yard care practices across the US. The authors note that in-depth surveys and interviews

across different regions will be important in future research.

Locke adds, "Lawn care is really important: it is an ~\$76 billion / year industry that is resource intensive with uncertain environmental impacts. We examined how irrigation, fertilization, and pesticide application vary by [household income](#), age, the number of neighbors known by name, across more than 7,000 households in climatically diverse Baltimore, Boston, Miami, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Phoenix, and Los Angeles. We found that higher incomes are associated with greater odds applying water, fertilizer and pesticides, but this relationship varies by climate."

More information: Locke DH, Polsky C, Grove JM, Groffman PM, Nelson KC, Larson KL, et al. (2019) Residential household yard care practices along urban-exurban gradients in six climatically-diverse U.S. metropolitan areas. *PLoS ONE* 14(11): e0222630.
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