

## ***A Short History of the Lawn***

Most Americans strive to emulate a landscape from 18th Century England, where broad, open pastoral vistas were maintained by wealthy landowners. In North America, Frederick Law Olmsted, the pioneering landscape architect and designer of New York City's Central Park, popularized this landscape. According to John Ingram, author of *When Cities Grow Wild* (available online at [www.for-wild.org](http://www.for-wild.org)), Olmsted's Riverside development on the outskirts of Chicago was one of the first suburban residential developments to mandate broad, open lawns with scattered trees and houses set well back from the sidewalk. "Riverside set the tone for suburban landscape development," according to Ingram. "Although Olmsted felt strongly about people having contact with nature, his was an ecologically denuded celebration of nature."

Our image of the ideal lawn has been further refined by advertising from the likes of Scotts, Monsanto, Ortho, ChemLawn, and hundreds of other companies that make up the multi-billion-dollar lawn-care industry in North America. We have been taught to strive for a monoculture of Kentucky bluegrass (not from Kentucky at all—or even North America, for that matter) and its ilk, maintained to a lush, deep green with nary a sprig of native vegetation. We punctuate this turf with periodic trees and shrubs, each perched on a mound of sterile mulch.