



Image courtesy of Chris Coucill

Princeton Passes Ordinance Restricting Use of Gas Leaf Blowers

At its meeting on October 25, the Princeton Council unanimously approved ordinance changes that ban the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers and other lawn equipment during certain times of the day and in the summer and winter months.

Please refer to the Table of Allowable Days and Hours of Use for Landscaping Equipment at the end of this newsletter or at this [link](#).

The Council's unanimous vote comes after many months of hard work behind the scenes, with deliberation by several individuals, boards, commissions and nonprofits involved in the effort.

Over the past year, Sustainable Princeton has led a grant-funded project, called Changing the Landscape: Healthy Yards = Healthy People, which seeks to improve both the health of the environment and the workers through the adoption of sustainable landscaping practices.

"I think we earned the confidence of the council members by updating them throughout the project and by following up and addressing the concerns of the various stakeholders," says Christine Symington, Program Director, Sustainable Princeton. "We tried to capture as many sides of the gas leaf blower issue as we could."

The ordinance changes represent an important first step away from fossil fuel-powered equipment, according to Molly Jones, Executive Director, Sustainable Princeton. "The phased-in approach was a compromise between residents who wanted zero gas-powered leaf blowers and the landscapers who need time to make this transition," she explains.

As a next step, homeowners need to make a cultural shift in the way they think about their lawns, says Jones. "Lawns don't need to be leaf-free to be well maintained. In fact, decayed leaves provide valuable nutrients to support a healthy lawn. We also need to increase recognition that dirty, gas-powered lawn equipment is detrimental to the health of the person using it."

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Model Approach

Jones hopes that the project's inclusive, equity-minded approach serves as a model for other communities. "We should always work to hear the voices that aren't usually heard," she says. "That often means making compromises. No side may be 100 percent happy with the result, but we can take all viewpoints into account and still make progress."

Symington agrees and adds that the project provided a good foundation for consensus building. "The process by which we involved all affected parties, including the landscapers, was a challenging one," she says. "In some ways, we only scratched the surface in the brief time we had, but we can build on those efforts over time. The process we used can certainly serve as a model for other municipalities whose leaders strive to hear all voices and deepen relationships with historically excluded communities when addressing similar issues."

The project team included co-partners Sustainable Princeton and the Princeton Environmental Commission, along with Unidad Latina en Acción NJ, the Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Quiet Princeton, Rutgers School of Public Health, the Rutgers Environmental Stewards program, and several Municipality of Princeton departments and commissions, including Human Services, the Board of Health, and the Civil Rights Commission.



Image courtesy of Lauren Suchenski

Transition Fund Will Help Landscapers Switch to Electric Equipment

Over the past year, the Changing the Landscape team heard repeatedly from landscapers that the cost of transitioning to electric equipment was a major concern for them.

While landscapers recognize the health and safety hazards inherent in the use of gas-powered lawn equipment, they also operate in a business with very low profit margins. Any capital cost increases are a notable burden on them.

To help support and incentivize small (10 or fewer employees) landscape companies in making the transition to battery-powered lawn equipment, Sustainable Princeton has established the Landscaping Equipment Transition Fund. This fund will provide meaningful reimbursement toward the purchase of any battery-powered landscaping equipment, including leaf blowers, string trimmers, hedge trimmers and mowers. To be eligible, companies must be registered in Princeton and meet a few simple requirements.

"Our goal is to raise \$35,000 and begin distributing reimbursements on January 5, 2022 on a first-come, first-served basis," says Josh Perlsweig, Program Coordinator, Sustainable Princeton. "To date, we've raised over \$22,000 from generous community members. We hope this will cushion the financial impact on small landscaping companies as we make changes that benefit the entire Princeton community."

If for some reason funds are not able to be distributed to landscapers for equipment reimbursement by the end of 2022, they will be used for general education about sustainable landscaping. Full details of the fund are available on the Sustainable Princeton website www.sustainableprinceton.org/equipmentfund

I Pledge ...

It's one thing to join the cast of hundreds in Princeton who say they're in favor of adopting more sustainable landscaping practices, but it's a whole different level of commitment to pledge that you'll take action on your own property. Much more meaningful, right?

As part of the Changing the Landscape initiative, that's exactly what Jenny Ludmer, Community Outreach Manager at Sustainable Princeton, asked a group of residents to do this year.

It began with a survey to residents in which they were asked, among other things, if they were interested in joining a pledge initiative that included receiving customized information (based on their expressed interests) about how they can make their lawns more sustainable. Each mailing included a pledge, which they were asked to either accept, or not.

Approximately 72 people joined the initiative, and subgroups were sent pledges to:

- Convert one piece of lawn equipment from gas-powered to electric
- Introduce more native plants to my yard this summer
- Share an invitation to a free electric equipment workshop with my landscaper

- Speak to my landscaper about electric options

- Leave the leaves (or ask my landscaper to leave the leaves) on my property this fall

In total, 32 pledges were accepted from 27 different individuals.

While only a small number of residents accepted and acted on each pledge, Ludmer says it's a start and was worth the effort. "For example," she says, "of the nine people who pledged to introduce more native plants in their yards this year, four of them had never planted natives before. To me, that's a success because we got them thinking about the importance of native plants, and they likely discussed it with their neighbors and friends, too. That's how we plant the seeds of sustainable landscaping."

Ludmer would like to see Princeton residents continue to adopt their own sustainable landscaping pledges now that the formal initiative has ended. What can you pledge to do on your property? Perhaps turn part of your lawn into a meadow? Install a rain garden? Reduce the use of harmful pesticides and herbicides? There are many options to choose from on the Sustainable Princeton website at www.sustainableprinceton.org/yard.



A portion of the grant from the Sustainable Jersey Gardiner Environmental Fund made it possible for both the Municipality and Princeton Public Schools (PPS) to test their first pieces of battery-powered equipment. Far left: The PPS grounds team now uses a large backpack leaf blower to maintain areas closer to buildings, where fumes produced by gas-powered equipment had previously kept them from working while the building was occupied. Left: Vikki Cannes of Princeton's Recreation Department uses a hand-held blower to maintain garden beds around the Municipal Building at 400 Witherspoon Street. "I like the fact that the leaf blower is lightweight and quiet and works best for routine maintenance. However, the battery lasts for about 45 minutes and this for me is the biggest drawback."

THOUGHTS FROM THE PROJECT TEAM...

"Princeton is now right on trend with what is already happening in other communities. More than 100 municipalities throughout the U.S. have partial or year-round bans on gas leaf blowers. But Princeton has done something unique. We involved our landscapers in making this happen. In all the reading I've done, I have not found a single other municipality that has included landscapers in its planning for a gas leaf blower ordinance. Some of the provisions in this ordinance were suggested by the landscapers themselves, and the rest are things they said they could live with. This is quite extraordinary, and Princeton should be proud!"

Phyllis Teitelbaum
Co-founder, Quiet Princeton



Image courtesy of Wibke Marten

"The Steering Committee that worked on this project had to balance the very important objectives of improving our environment (both carbon emissions and noise) on the one hand, without placing too heavy a financial burden on our landscape company owners and their workers. Most of the 70-80 landscape companies that operate in Princeton are small and are primarily owned and operated by people in the Latino community. They will benefit from the environmental improvements, but they would certainly not benefit if their companies went out of business. So, we sought to achieve a careful balance."

John Heilner
Chair of Immigration Committee,
Princeton Human Services Commission

"The passing of these ordinance amendments is a first and crucial step on the path to sustainable landscaping in Princeton. It establishes Princeton as a modern, progressive town that tackles local policy with enhanced approaches inclusive to all – and I include Mother Earth in this."

Tammy L. Sands
Chair, Princeton
Environmental Commission

"This is an attempt to achieve an environmentally sustainable goal while simultaneously focusing on social justice and racial equity. It's been a long haul, but we're here, and I think our project partners are happy to be here and excited about the outcome of moving this forward."

Eve Niedergang
Councilmember, Princeton Council

"I wholeheartedly support the ordinance changes, including a seasonal ban on gas leaf blowers. It's a great first step. But there is a very strong public desire in Princeton for a year-round ban. This ordinance can be the catalyst for a more widespread paradigm shift in awareness. Landscapers and residents will learn that they can live without gas leaf blowers, just as they did before they were invented."

Eunice Wong
Leading Member of Quiet Princeton



above: Members of municipal and school district staff get first-hand experience with battery-powered equipment.



above: Landscape company owners learn about the features of a battery-powered lawn mower.

Landscaper Workshop Informs and Inspires

"We're witnessing the future, right here, right now." That's how one Princeton Public Works employee summed up his experience at a workshop for professional landscapers held at Community Park School last August. The workshop included presentations on the health and safety impacts of using gas-powered lawn equipment and the benefits of switching to electric.

"It's refreshing to work with a non-profit that takes an inclusive and equitable approach to addressing the issues that come with operating gas equipment in their communities," says Dan Mabe, Founder and President of the American Green Zone Alliance, a national organization committed to sustainable land care and improving working conditions for landscape workers. "We want to thank Sustainable Princeton for hosting this educational workshop, which was held in English and Spanish, and American Sign Language, and for ensuring that all stakeholders are part of the process of finding balanced solutions."

Jen Stroker, Northeast Regional Business Development Manager at Mean Green Mowers, one of the vendors at the event, says she was thrilled to participate. "The classroom sessions were informative and well put together, and the equipment demonstration portion was great for us. We had three electric mowers there and they were in constant use throughout the afternoon. It was an incredible way to introduce people to our products in a fun, engaging way."



above (left to right): Jamie Banks, Quiet Communities; Anthony Lunn, Quiet Princeton; Dan Mabe, AGZA; Christine Symington, Sustainable Princeton; Phyllis Teitelbaum, Quiet Princeton; Eve Coulson, CTL Steering Committee member.



above: Doug Conners, Connors Landscaping, was one of three raffle winners.



above: Brand representatives brought full lines of battery-powered equipment built to meet the demands of commercial operation.

Elder Ramirez: Eyeing the Future of Lawn Care

“Eventually, as electric lawn equipment becomes more affordable in the next few years, gas-powered equipment, with its noise and fumes, will be phased out.”

Elder Ramirez likes to stay a step ahead. That’s why, as owner of Verdant Organic Lawns, he was one of the early adopters of organic lawn treatments and is open to working with customers who want to try new things, such as creating meadows in their yards, or mulching their leaves instead of using gas-powered leaf blowers.

And that’s why, when asked if he wanted to participate in a project to encourage more sustainable lawn care practices in Princeton, he jumped at the chance.

Ramirez has been an active participant in the yearlong Changing the Landscape: Healthy Yards = Healthy People project that brought Princeton residents and landscapers together to work toward adopting practices that protect the health of both landscape workers and the local environment. He attended several focus group meetings designed to gather input from landscapers about the potential impact on their businesses should the town decide to ban or limit the use of gas-powered lawn equipment.

“It was great to be involved in the project, to give a landscaper’s perspective on the issues, and to learn about how we can help the environment,” says Ramirez. “Some landscapers don’t want to change. They just want to keep doing what they’re doing with gas-powered equipment because they think it is the best or most profitable way to do things. But eventually they will be forced to change. It’s the way of the future.”

In August, Ramirez attended a free workshop for landscape professionals in Princeton, where he had the opportunity to test drive a large commercial electric mower and try out several handheld electric lawn tools.

“I really liked the big electric mower,” he says. “It’s a good piece of equipment – efficient, much quieter, powerful enough to do the job. But right now, it’s almost double the price of a gas mower. Once the prices come down, or if we qualify for funding through the transition



Image courtesy of Jairo Palomo

above: Elder Ramirez, center, talks to a representative from an equipment manufacturer at the AGZA Workshop held in August.

fund, I plan to invest in one. It will allow me to offer electric mowing on my larger properties.”

Ramirez currently owns an electric hedge trimmer, leaf blower, weed whacker, and small electric push mower, which he uses on five of his smaller properties. Anthony Lunn and Phyllis Teitelbaum’s property is one of them.

“It’s remarkable to compare the whisper noise of his electric mower and leaf blower on our property with the deafening roar of the large, gas-powered equipment used on our neighbors’ small lots,” says Lunn, who is a co-founder of Quiet Princeton along with his wife Phyllis. “Elder Ramirez is a wonderful man. He takes his work seriously and does it with great care.”

Eve Coulson, another Princeton resident and customer of Verdant Organic Lawns, agrees. She hired Ramirez many years ago because he offered organic lawn treatments and she continues to enjoy working with him today. She says he is helping her figure out how to convert parts of her lawn into no-mow meadows and where to place native plants.

“I appreciate his willingness to experiment with new ways of doing things,” Coulson says. “We talk through ideas and make decisions together. We’re all learning more each day about sustainable lawn care practices, and Elder helps me figure out how I can make positive changes one step at a time.”

Thoughts on Recent Ordinance Changes

During the past year, as the Princeton Environmental Commission and Princeton Council considered proposals for restricting the use of

gas leaf blowers and other noise-generating landscaping equipment, Ramirez was there to share his opinions and offer suggestions. What does he think about the outcome now that the ordinance changes passed with overwhelming support at a Council meeting in late October?

“It’s being done the right way,” he says. “By limiting the use of gas-powered equipment, but not banning it totally, they are allowing us time to transition without putting us out of business. It’s a start. It’s an important first step, and I’ve learned so much about how we can do things differently to help the environment and improve our own health.”

right: “Pocket meadows” being created by Elder Ramirez after selecting areas to stop mowing.

below: Examples of progression over time as areas previously managed as lawn are allowed to grow.



PROJECT PARTNERS



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ALLOWABLE DAYS AND HOURS OF USE OF LANDSCAPING EQUIPMENT

Tool	Spring			Summer			Fall			Winter			
LEAF BLOWER	Mar 15 - May 15			May 16-Sept 30			Oct 1 - Dec 15			Dec 16 - Mar 14			Named Holidays 1pm-6pm
	Mon-Fri 8am-8pm	Sat 8am-5pm	Sun 1pm-6pm	Mon-Fri 8am-8pm	Sat 8am-5pm	Sun 1pm-6pm	Mon-Fri 8am-8pm	Sat 8am-5pm	Sun 1pm-6pm	Mon-Fri 8am-8pm	Sat 8am-5pm	Sun 1pm-6pm	
Gas-Powered	YES	YES	NO	NO			YES	YES	NO	NO			NO
Battery-Powered, Corded Electric	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

Tool	Year-round			
LAWN MOWER	Mon-Fri 8am-8pm	Sat 8am-5pm	Sun 1pm-6pm	Named Holidays 1pm-6pm
Gas-Powered	YES	YES	YES	YES
Battery-Powered, Corded Electric	YES	YES	YES	YES

HEDGE, STRING OR POLE TRIMMER	Mon-Fri 8am-8pm	Sat 8am-5pm	Sun 1pm-6pm	Named Holidays 1pm-6pm
Gas-Powered	YES	YES	NO	NO
Battery-Powered, Corded Electric	YES	YES	YES	YES

Property owners/managers and hired landscapers (if applicable) are CO-RESPONSIBLE for compliance with the rules. Both are subject to penalties following any violation.

The municipality will notify the property owners/managers and hired landscapers (if applicable) if a violation is reported to have taken place on their property, and any hired landscaper involved. Violations will be issued to both the property owner and the hired landscaper involved.

Named holidays: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day.

Provisions are lifted when equipment is used in response to a bona fide emergency such as a storm or other natural disaster.

Report violations through SeeClickFix https://seeclickfix.com/princeton_nj

Pursuant to the Ordinance, written warnings shall be given for the first two violations before February 2022. If additional violations are incurred, a summons will be issued and a municipal court appearance will be required to resolve the matter.

Landscapers must register with the municipality annually by March 1st. Register online at <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1240/Landscape-Contractor-Regulations>.

Other gas-powered equipment such as chain saws, snow blowers and portable generators can be used Mon - Fri 8 am - 8 pm, Sat 8 am - 5 pm unless they are used in response to a bona fide emergency such as a power outage, snow storm or other natural disaster.

Helpful links for more information:

- Landscape Contractor Regulations webpage <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1240/Landscape-Contractor-Regulations>
- Resident Landscape Regulations webpage <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1239/Landscape-Maintenance-Regulations>
- Ordinance 2021-32 <https://www.princetonnj.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8929/2021-32-Ordinance-PDF?bidId=>

DÍAS Y HORAS PERMITIDOS PARA EL USO DE EQUIPO DE JARDINERÍA

Máquina	Primavera			Verano			Otoño			Invierno			
SOPLADOR DE HOJAS	15 de marzo a 15 de mayo			16 de mayo a 30 de septiembre			1 de octubre a 15 de diciembre			16 de diciembre a 14 de marzo			Días festivos 1pm-6pm
	lunes - viernes 8am - 8pm	sábados 8am-5pm	domingos 1pm-6pm	lunes - viernes 8am - 8pm	sábados 8am-5pm	domingos 1pm-6pm	lunes - viernes 8am - 8pm	sábados 8am-5pm	domingos 1pm-6pm	lunes - viernes 8am - 8pm	sábados 8am-5pm	domingos 1pm-6pm	
Con gasolina	SI	SI	NO	NO			SI	SI	NO	NO			NO
Cargado con batería o con cable eléctrico	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI	SI

Máquina	Todo el año			
CORTADORA DE PASTO	lunes - viernes 8am - 8pm	sábados 8am-5pm	domingos 1pm-6pm	Días festivos 1pm-6pm
Con gasolina	SI	SI	SI	SI
Cargado con batería o con cable eléctrico	SI	SI	SI	SI

CORTASETOS, RECORTADORA DE HILO, RECORTADORA DE PÉRTIGA	lunes - viernes 8am - 8pm	sábados 8am-5pm	domingos 1pm-6pm	Días festivos 1pm-6pm
Con gasolina	SI	SI	NO	NO
Cargado con batería o con cable eléctrico	SI	SI	SI	SI

Los propietarios / administradores y los jardineros contratados; si así corresponde, son CORRESPONSABLES del cumplimiento de las reglas. Por lo que ambos están sujetos a sanciones después de cualquier infracción.

El municipio notificará a los propietarios/administradores de la propiedad y jardineros contratados; si así corresponde, si se ha producido una infracción en su propiedad. Las infracciones se comunicarán tanto al propietario de la propiedad como cuando así corresponda al jardinero contratado o involucrado.

Días festivos señalados: Día de Año Nuevo, Día de los Caídos, Día de la Independencia, Día del Trabajo, Día de Acción de Gracias, Día de Navidad.

Las provisiones se eliminan cuando el equipo se usa en respuesta a una emergencia genuina; como una tormenta u otro desastre natural.

Informe se sobre infracciones a través de SeeClickFix https://seeclickfix.com/princeton_nj

De conformidad con la Ordenanza, se darán advertencias por escrito para las dos primeras violaciones antes de febrero de 2022. Si se incurren en violaciones adicionales, se emitirá una citación y se requerirá una comparecencia ante un tribunal municipal para resolver el asunto.

Los jardineros deben registrarse en el municipio anualmente antes del 1 de marzo. Regístrese en línea en <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1240/Landscape-Contractor-Regulations>

Otros equipos que funcionan con gas: como sierras de cadena, quitanieves y generadores portátiles, se pueden usar de lunes a viernes de 8 am - 8 pm, sábado 8 am - 5 pm o durante una tormenta de nieve u otro desastre natural.

Enlaces útiles para obtener más información:

- Página web de Regulaciones para contratistas de jardinería <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1240/Landscape-Contractor-Regulations>
- Página web de Regulaciones del paisaje para residentes <https://www.princetonnj.gov/1239/Landscape-Maintenance-Regulations>
- Ordenanza 2021-32 <https://www.princetonnj.gov/DocumentCenter/View/8929/2021-32-Ordinance-PDF?bidId=>