



March 2022

## Environmentally Friendly Lawn and Garden Care

Keeping your grass, plants, and garden healthy all season long can require constant attention, but it doesn't have to require the constant use of chemicals. Excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides leads to water pollution through the stormwater drainage system and groundwater infiltration. When it rains, stormwater runoff flows from lawns into stormwater drainage inlets, picking up pollutants (such as fertilizers and pesticides), transports them directly to our streams, killing fish and impairing our water sources.

### Stormwater Friendly Lawn and Garden Tips:

- 1) Fertilizer. An organic alternative is compost. Compost is a free form of fertilizer and contains the many nutrients needed for your garden.
- 2) Pesticides. Identify the pest and research your options. Many insects are harmless and play an important role in maintaining a healthy lawn or garden ecosystem. If there is a problem, however, identify the exact pest you have. Do your research, as there are many non-chemical alternatives to controlling pests.
- 3) Dispose of yard debris properly. Grass clippings, landscape trimmings, leaves, etc should be put in the trash or compost area because they can clog stormwater systems, prevent water from entering the drainage system, cause localized flooding and property damage. Not only can the improper disposal cause flooding, but it can also impair our water resources. Lawn clippings blown into the street find their way to a storm drain, where they begin to decay, releasing nutrients that encourage algae blooms and therefore, depletes oxygen content in water and suffocates aquatic life.
- 4) Set mower height to 3 inches or higher: taller grass slows the rate of runoff and will produce a deeper and denser root system. Denser roots will absorb more water, reducing lawn runoff and preventing erosion.
- 5) Fertilizers for lawn- do you need it? If so- what, where, when, and how much? Many lawns do not need fertilizer. But if your lawn is thin or has bare spots and requires fertilizer, please implement the following:
  - Test your soil or consult a local professional: Soil tests can reveal that lawns may be suffering from micronutrient deficiency and a [chemical](#) fertilizer may not alleviate the problem. Identifying these needs will reduce unnecessary applications, create a healthier lawn faster, and reduce long-term costs.
  - Maximize the slow-release [nitrogen](#) in your fertilizer: Slow-release [nitrogen](#) limits nutrient [runoff](#) and exportation. This should be applied in the Spring, opposed to the Fall, to provide a steady source of [nutrients](#) throughout the growing season.

- Apply less than 1 pound per 1000 square feet per application: Some instructions refer to pounds per season, not to be confused with application- as there are multiple applications per season.
- Start with low amounts or fewer applications: Your lawn may achieve its ideal coverage and growth with reduced rates, saving time and money.
- Apply only during the growing season and check the weather: Wait until the grass begins growing in March to fertilize and avoid fertilizing after October. Fertilizing during a lawn's dormant season increases the risk of running off into streams or leaching into your [water table](#) because root systems are less active. Additionally, do not fertilize directly before a rain event, because most will wash off in [stormwater runoff](#).
- Do not fertilize or use pesticides with 15 to 20 feet of a stream, use riparian-specific herbicides if necessary: Keeping this distance will help keep [chemicals](#) out of the stream.