

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF YARD CARE



The following yard care suggestions will minimize water pollution while keeping a healthy and attractive lawn.

DISPOSAL AND STORAGE OF YARD CLIPPINGS

- Keep leaves and grass out of streets, drainage ditches, storm drains and creeks.
- Grass clippings can stay on the lawn. They are a natural fertilizer.
- Compost plant clippings, leaves, excess grass clippings and other plant material, or bag them for curbside pickup.
- Protect landscaping materials from wind and rain by storing them under tarps or in a shed.

PLANT AND LAWN CARE

- Choose grass and plants with low nutrient and water needs.
- Select native plants (they are adapted to your area and will require less fertilizer and pesticide).
- Only water when plants and grass show signs of stress.

LAWN SPECIFIC TIPS

- Set blade higher on lawn mower. This reduces stress to the grass and helps develop a drought and pest resistant root system.
- Use electric powered lawn equipment instead of gas powered whenever possible.
- Try not to seed a lawn on a steep slope or in an area that does not drain well. Sod across the slope to protect the soil from erosion and runoff.

COMPOSTING

An alternative to discarding or burning yard waste is composting.



Try composting clipped leaves, pine needles, yard trimmings, grass clippings and other vegetation in your yard. Also use your own pine straw and other clippings for mulch. Try sharing your extra pine needles with a neighbor. Schools and civic groups will sell pine straw as a fundraising effort. Consider donating your remaining pine needles to those organizations.

FERTILIZER

Looking for ways to keep your yard green without polluting a stream? Consider fertilizer options that are Earth friendly.



Using too much fertilizer may affect water quality in your area. Nutrients from fertilizers—usually phosphates—enter rivers and streams and stimulate the growth of algae. Excessive algae growth harms oxygen levels in lakes and ponds, thus killing fish and other aquatic life.

To help avoid this problem, try the following suggestions:

- Leave grass clippings on the lawn as a natural fertilizer.
- Test soil for nutrient levels.
 - University of Georgia's Cooperative Extension Service county offices offer a residential soil-testing program; residents can submit a soil sample to be tested.
 - Independent laboratories also offer soil sampling.
- Use the tests to choose a fertilizer that adds only the needed nutrients.
- Once vegetation is established, you can reduce the amount of nitrogen you apply.
- Choose a fertilizer with a slow-release form of nitrogen to reduce the potential leaching into groundwater, especially on sandy soils or to reduce loss from runoff.
- Do not apply fertilizer before heavy rain is forecasted.
- Sweep up fertilizer that is spread out on sidewalks instead of using water to wash it off.

Tip: If you are trying to have a greener lawn during the summer, then use iron (chelated iron or ferrous sulfate) instead of nitrogen.

PEST MANAGEMENT

ARE PESTS BUGGING YOU?

Try the following method for reducing pests and minimizing pollution. Toxic pesticides can adversely affect your family, neighbors, pets and the surrounding environment. Pesticide is the generic term for insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides.



- Read labels and use as directed.
- Store pesticides in covered containers.
- Use prescription flea drops for pets instead of treating a lawn.
- Have weeds, diseases or insects properly identified before applying a pesticide. Remember to follow the label and use as directed.
- Spot treat only affected areas instead of widespread application. (Widespread application can kill beneficial insects.)
- Control pests and disease by rinsing plants, pruning and hand picking, setting baits/traps.
- Try nontoxic or least toxic methods and products first such as traps or horticultural oils and insecticide soaps.

GOOD BUGS

Some insects actually help keep pests under natural control without causing harm to humans. Determine what bugs are essential to your garden applying insecticide. Some of the "good bugs" include:



Lady beetle



Assassin bug



Earwig



Green lacewing



Big-eyed bug



Syrphid fly

Tip: Use alternative methods to pest management as well as fertilizer application to control the appearance of your lawn. Limit the amount of pesticides applied to an area.