



Hennepin County Environmental Services

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Earth-friendly lawn care tips

Healthy lawns are good for the environment. A healthy, vigorous lawn needs less watering, fewer chemicals and less maintenance. Follow these tips to have a great looking lawn and minimize your impact on the environment:

- **Mow at a higher setting.** Grass mowed to a height of 2 ½ to 3 inches develops deeper, healthier roots and has a competitive advantage over weeds.
- **Manage your grass clippings.** Don't blow or rake grass clippings and leaves into the street. Leave them on your lawn, use them for compost or bag them up. Grass clippings and leaves in the street end up in the storm sewer where they are carried to nearby lakes and streams. Clippings and leaves contain phosphorus and other nutrients that, like fertilizer, feed algae and other aquatic plants. Algae blooms stress fish and wildlife and make it unpleasant or impossible to swim or fish.
- **Water less frequently.** Most lawns require just 1 inch of water a week. If you water too frequently, you encourage the grass roots to remain near the surface. By watering less frequently but more thoroughly, you force the roots to search more deeply for moisture, resulting in deep, healthy root systems that can tolerate the hot summer months.
- **Fertilize smart.** Most Minnesota lawns only need to be fertilized once a year in the fall. Be sure your fertilizer is phosphorus-free. Soils in our area already contain enough phosphorus to maintain most lawns. Sweep up any fertilizer that spills onto hard surfaces. Excess fertilizer washes away into nearby lakes or streams where it can feed algae.

- **Use chemicals wisely.** Read the label before using herbicides and pesticides and apply according to directions. Use the minimum amount needed to control the problem. Consider spot treatment instead of treating the entire lawn. Consider using alternative or natural remedies or remove the problem by hand.
- **Seed bare patches to prevent erosion and soil loss.** If you have trouble growing grass in a certain area of your yard, for example in shady spots or on a steep slope, consider replacing that section of the lawn with other plants that are more tolerant of the conditions.
- **Aerate your lawn periodically to loosen the soil.** Aerification is done with a machine that pulls 2 to 3 inch cores of soil from the lawn, allowing air, water and nutrients to be incorporated into the soil. This will improve plant health and dramatically improve water infiltration. You can rent a machine or hire a service.

For more information on these and other actions you can take to protect water quality, visit www.hennepin.us/water.

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Editor's Note

This sample newsletter article was provided by Hennepin County as a part of a coordinated education campaign with the county's watershed organizations. If you have any questions about the campaign, please contact Angie Timmons at 612-348-2477. Published June 2009.