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.

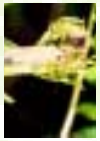
Good Bugs

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

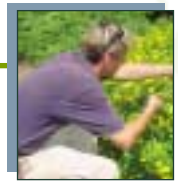
Tip: Use alternative methods to pest management as well as fertilizer application to control the appearance of your lawn. Limit the amount of pesticides applied to an area.

ABOUT THIS BROCHURE

Did you know that some of your landscaping and/or lawn care practices may not be as "green" as you think? Lawns and landscaped areas have the potential to be sources of water pollutants such as nutrients, pesticides and organic materials.

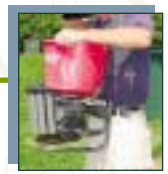
For more information about water pollution visit www.cleanwatercampaign.com

Design and Installation



- Design a landscape that reduces runoff and encourages natural infiltration of rain.
  - Minimize impervious areas.
  - Do not allow bare soil areas in the landscape.
  - Incorporate existing native vegetation into the landscape design when possible and select plants best adapted to the local climate, soils and growing conditions.
  - Choose turf grass that is heat and drought tolerant.
- Protect streams and waterways and reduce erosion by leaving an undisturbed vegetative buffer along stream banks.
- Do not plant hard-to-mow areas such as steep slopes in turf grass. Use ground covers, trees, shrubs or other perennials to reduce plant maintenance.
- Schedule grading and excavation projects during dry weather.
- Mulch or seed areas that lie idle after land disturbing activities.
- Prior to hydro seeding, cover all storm drains to ensure the material does not get washed into streams, rivers and lakes.

Applying Fertilizer



- Apply only the amount of fertilizer that the turf or plant requires.
- Provide soil-sampling services to your customers to assure proper fertilizer and lime applications. Local Cooperative Extension Service offices can provide information on soil sampling procedures and where to get soil analysis services in your area.
- Do not apply fertilizer if heavy rain is predicted.
- Avoid fertilizing during periods of limited rainfall. Fertilizers are chemical salts and can dehydrate drought-stressed plant roots.
- Use slow-release forms of nitrogen, such as urea formaldehyde, IBDU or sulfur-coated urea.
- Calibrate fertilizer spreaders and application equipment to ensure proper rates are applied.
- Around waterways, use a deflector shield with spreaders. Avoid throwing granules in water and leave a three-foot buffer of unfertilized turf.
- Minimize the amount of fertilizer applied to non-target areas by closing the spreader when passing over paved surfaces.
- If fertilizer is spilled or lands on paved surfaces, sweep it up and apply it to the lawn.
- A light irrigation immediately after fertilizer application will move the nutrients into the soil so they won't wash off in the next storm.

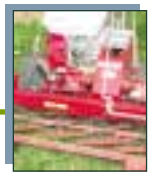
Applying Pesticides

- Read the pesticide label BEFORE you purchase, handle or apply it. The label provides safe usage and storage information. It is dangerous and illegal to not use as directed.
- Obtain a Georgia Pesticide Applicators License. For more information go to www.agr.state.ga.us/.

Integrated Pest Management

- Integrated Pest Management (IPM), a practice used by leading professional landscape companies, integrates a regular monitoring program with correct diagnosis of pest problems. It promotes the use of cultural, biological and mechanical means of controlling pests. And, it advocates intervention with pesticides only when necessary to avoid serious damage.
- The key to a successful IPM program is frequent inspection and accurate diagnosis of pests.
- Consult your local county Cooperative Extension Service office for assistance in identifying pests or selecting the best management option.
- Cultural control methods include proper planting methods, plant selection and maintenance practices such as using pest-resistant plant varieties.
- Mechanical control consists of practices like trapping or destroying pests by hand, pruning infested plant parts and mulching to prevent weed growth.
- Biological control methods are already in place in nature in the form of predator-prey relationships. Certain flowering plants and wildlife enhancements can attract insect-eating predators that can naturally control pest problems.

Management of Grass Clippings



- Properly maintained turf grass improves soil structure, stabilizes topsoil and reduces erosion and runoff.
- Avoid mowing more than 1/3 of the grass length. This may warrant more frequent mowing or changing the mower height in certain seasons. Use a mulching mower when possible.
- Don't blow, sweep or dump grass clippings or leaves into the street, down storm drains or drainage ditches.
- Compost plant clippings, leaves, excess grass clippings and other plant material, or bag them for curbside pickup.
- Recycle grass clippings. Clippings can provide up to 30 percent of the total fertilizer needs.
- Mulching leaves into the turf with a mulching mower can also be beneficial.
- Reuse compost in your landscape maintenance. The use of compost improves soil texture and structure, moisture retention and adds valuable nutrients.

Consumer Education

- Tell your client the benefits of grass clipping recycling. Lawn clippings left on the ground can provide nutrients and lower the amount of fertilizer required.
- After each service visit, leave a ticket telling the customer what pests were detected, any other problems and recommendations for management. Explain in detail the corrective actions taken to ensure approval of the management practices used.
- Maintain membership(s) in a professional landscaping organization(s) to stay current on maintenance methods and the newest plant varieties available. Become a certified professional and advertise this fact to your customers.