

How to care less for your lawn... and more for clean water

If it's green, it must be good. Or is it?

Because of their large surface areas and limited ability to absorb and infiltrate runoff, single-species grass lawns can pose environmental problems. They act like hard surfaces, sending rain and melting snow into waterways and storm drains. That runoff carries fertilizers and herbicides to our lakes and streams—causing toxic algal blooms, pollution, and nuisance plant growth in lakes.

Minimize your turf lawn, maximize your savings.

Lawns are susceptible to drought and require regular watering, mowing, feeding, weeding and—often—expensive maintenance services. The alternative? Deep-rooted native plants that help trap and infiltrate runoff. Once established, these hardy, adaptable native species are drought tolerant, disease resistant, and require little or no water or fertilizer—making them virtually care-free and cost-free to maintain.

Reimagine your lawn or downsize it using native flowers, grasses, shrubs and trees.

Or consider planting a “no-mow” lawn of native Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) or Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra L.*).

IF YOU DO HAVE A GRASS LAWN, KEEP IT HEALTHY
WITH THESE FRESH-WATER-FRIENDLY TIPS:



AIM FOR 3 INCHES OR TALLER!



Mow high. Leave 3 inches or more on grass blades to promote root growth and shade out weeds. Avoid mowing directly to the edge of lakes and streams. Grass clippings in water add excess nutrients as they break down.

Let it lie. Clippings that are mulched and returned to the lawn can contribute up to 25 percent of a lawn’s seasonal fertilizer needs and help soil retain moisture.

Sweep grass clippings off hard or paved surfaces and back onto the lawn to prevent them from getting washed into storm drains or waterways.

Aerate compacted soil with a coring machine improves drainage and allows water and oxygen to reach grass roots.



Water less. A green lawn in Michigan only needs 0.5 to 1.5 inches of water per week. Light, frequent watering keeps beneficial microorganisms active, minimizes stress to the grass, and helps prevent runoff from your property.

Worry less. Lawn dormancy is a natural response to drought. (However, some watering may be necessary during droughts lasting more than a month.)

Water efficiently with smart systems like climate- or soil-moisture- based controllers that automatically adjust watering. To prevent waste and runoff, direct sprinklers away from driveways, patios, and sidewalks.

Mulch more. Mulching around plants and trees with compost, wood chips, shredded leaves, or shredded bark will help retain soil moisture by reducing evaporation. Mulch also cuts down on weeds and moderates soil temperature.

Put your lawn on a diet!

Get in the know.

Let fertilizers go. Fertilizers and herbicides eventually end up in our lakes and streams, where they can cause serious problems. By not using fertilizers, you'll save money AND protect our water quality.



Get a soil test.

Have your soil tested every 2 to 3 years or when renovating your landscape to find out what nutrients and organic matter it actually needs.

Choose compost instead of fertilizer.

Just 1/2 inch of compost, raked into your lawn, will contribute organic matter, nutrients and microorganisms...and help build soil fertility.

Leave a buffer zone.

Keep fertilizers at least 25 feet from waterways.

Stop runoff. Sweep excess fertilizer off of paved surfaces and back onto the lawn.

Watch the weather. And never fertilize when heavy rain is predicted.

Don't use weed-and-feed products.

Choose fertilizers free of all pesticides, including herbicides.

Fertilize in the fall. Grass roots store nutrients over the winter months for future use in the spring, so additional fertilizer before May is rarely needed. Also, never spread fertilizer when the ground is still frozen.



On bags of fertilizer, look for a "P" at or close to zero.



Huron
River
Watershed
Council

Huron River Watershed Council

www.hrc.org

The Huron River Watershed Council coordinates programs and volunteer efforts aimed at protecting and restoring the Huron. Our work is supported through the membership of individuals, local businesses, and more than 40 communities across Southeast Michigan.

What is an H2O Hero?

You can be an H2O Hero! An H2O Hero protects water quality in their everyday actions. They pick up and dispose of pet waste in the trash, sweep fertilizer spills off sidewalks and driveways, choose phosphorus-free fertilizer, plant deep-rooted native plants or use rain gardens to capture and infiltrate runoff, and save water to save energy.

When you help keep pollution out of our streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater with simple steps taken right in your own home or back yard, YOU are an H2O Hero!

The H2O Heroes campaign...

Is brought to you by communities that are committed to protecting water quality and securing our watershed as a permanent source of clean drinking water, natural beauty, and diverse recreational opportunities. Partners include Ann Arbor Charter Township, Ann Arbor Public Schools, Barton Hills Village, City of Ann Arbor, City of Belleville, City of Chelsea, City of Dexter, City of Ypsilanti, Eastern Michigan University, Pittsfield Charter Township, Scio Township, Superior Charter Township, University of Michigan-Environment, Health & Safety, Washtenaw County Road Commission, Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner, Ypsilanti Charter Township, and VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System (VAAHS).

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