

Spring into Sustainable Lawn Care

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The days are longer, the torrents of rain have turned to light drizzles, and the sun is shining brighter everyday. That's right folks- spring is just around the corner! You know what that means: Time to focus some of that extra outdoor time on your lawn.

If you are planning on doing some spring-cleaning of your lawn this season, it's important to keep stormwater pollution prevention in mind. Rain or irrigation water can wash fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides off of grass and into storm drains, which lead directly into streams and rivers without treatment. Fertilizer run-off may cause unintended blooms of algae and other aquatic plants. When these large blooms die off and start decomposing any and all available oxygen is used up. This leaves little or no oxygen for other plants or fish. Pesticides and herbicides can work their way up the food chain and into the bellies of fish. Chemicals found in herbicides and pesticides can be harmful to fish populations causing deformities, illness, and even death. Yard debris and grass clippings can be washed off of sidewalks by rain or irrigation water and may clog storm drains or pollute nearby streams.

You can follow a few of these simple suggestions to get your lawn ready for spring while helping keep fish happy:

- Overseed your lawn. This helps out-compete weeds and plug up bare spots without fertilizer.
- Mow your lawn every three weeks. This allows for the grass to flower and still brings nutrients back into the soil.
- Set your lawn mower to a grass height of 3 inches. Most grasses thrive at this height.
- Instead of fertilizing, try leaving grass clippings in your lawn to keep in nutrients.
- Sweep grass clippings or excess fertilizer off of sidewalks or streets and back into your lawn.
- Aerate your soil to avoid compaction and to allow fertilizers to seep further down in the root system. You usually only need to aerate every few years.
- Use alternatives to chemical fertilizers such as high-quality compost. Spread a thin layer of compost over your lawn. After you apply the compost, lightly water your lawn so the compost sinks into the soil. Be careful not to overwater, as the compost may be washed away and end up in the storm system.
- If you do use chemical fertilizers, use slow-release fertilizers. These limit the amount of times you have to apply and are better for your lawn.
- Be sure to test the soil before you apply any kind of fertilizer. Testing the soil can prevent over-application and burnout of your grass. You can purchase soil test kits at your local hardware store.

The spring is a great time to get your yard ready for summer. Just remember to keep our streams healthy and free from nutrient and chemical pollution by practicing fish-friendly lawn maintenance.