

Don't 'leave' lawn care chores until spring

Fall is the best time of year to fertilize your lawn and control weeds. In fact, healthy lawns help area lakes and streams. Thick grass prevents soil erosion by slowing down runoff and allowing the absorption of water.

By soaking up rainwater, lawns decrease the amount of stormwater runoff funneling pollutants into lakes and streams.

The following fall lawn care tips help provide a healthy lawn and help protect water quality:

MOW THE GRASS

It is important to keep your grass 2 to 2 1/2 inches tall throughout the fall.

If it is too long, it could be prone to winter lawn diseases, on the other hand, if it is too short, it won't be large enough to store food for growth in the spring.

WATER THE GRASS

Even though it is cooler in the fall, lawns still need regular watering to maintain plant health and better survive winter conditions.

Go ahead and water as needed until the ground is cold and beginning to freeze.

If you have an automatic irrigation system, avoid damage by having it blown out with compressed air before the water freezes in the pipes and sprinkler heads.

FERTILIZE

Mid-to-late-October is the best time of year to fertilize your lawn.

Fertilizer provides grass with nutrients for spring growth. You should use no phosphorus fertilizer be-

cause the soils in the area already have enough phosphorus.

Proper fertilization will make your yard thick and green, and keep the green out of our lakes.

Fertilizers containing phosphorus cannot be used on lawns and turf in Minnesota unless one of the following situations exists:

- A soil test or plant tissue test shows a need for phosphorus.

- A new lawn is being established by seeding or laying sod.

- Phosphorus fertilizer is being applied on a golf course by trained staff.

- Phosphorus fertilizer is being applied on farms growing sod for sale.

When these situations do not exist, state law requires phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer is to be used. The nutrient value of a fertilizer is indicated by a series of three numbers printed on its container.

The numbers represent percent nutrient content of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, in that order.

A fertilizer marked with 22-0-15, for example, is phosphorus-free as the middle number is zero (0).

CONTROL WEEDS

September is the best time of year to treat dandelions and Creeping Charlie. Limited amount of weeds should be removed by hand or spot treated with herbicides.

SWEEP UP

Sweep up and reuse lawn care products that fall on the streets, sidewalks, and driveways.

Also keep grass clippings, leaf litter, and other organic debris off of driveways, sidewalks, and streets.

MULCH, RECYCLE LEAVES IN FALL

There are several ways you can dispose of fallen leaves.

We recommend composting because it keeps leaves out of streets and storm sewers.

Composting also gives you a great natural fertilizer for your garden.

You can also use fallen leaves, whole or chipped by a lawn mower, as winter mulch around rose bushes and landscape plants.

Allow fallen leaves to remain on your lawn and make several passes over them with a lawn mower, chopping them into a thin layer fine enough to stay on the lawn without causing damage, while providing nutrients for the grass.

You can also rake and bag your leaves and dispose them at local compost sites.

For more information, contact Randy Anhorn, administrator/limnologist at the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District office at 651-209-9753, or visit clfwd.org.

THE COLUMN IS A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM THE COMFORT LAKE-FOREST LAKE WATERSHED DISTRICT.



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