

Not too late in season to rethink lawncare methods

Whether living on or near a lake, in the city or in rural areas, everyone has an impact on the water quality in our lakes, streams and rivers.

Precipitation that doesn't infiltrate into the soil is called run-off. In both urban and rural residential areas this runoff may contain pollutants such as lawn clippings, leaves, litter, fertilizers and pet wastes.

Cities have storm sewer systems carry the run-off to lakes and rivers. In rural areas the run-off enters our lakes and rivers through drainage ditches, road ditches, wetlands and river tributaries.

Agricultural areas also have run-off that may contain agricultural wastes such as soil that has eroded, fertilizers, pesticides and animal wastes.

These pollutants can enter our lakes and rivers through drainage tiles, drainage ditches or directly through surface run-off. For those who live along a lake, the impact is more obvious and immediate.

Modern day methods of lawn care often contribute to the run-off that pollutes our lakes and rivers. These management methods often include:

- Removal of natural vegetation

- Expansion of hard surface area such as roofs and driveways (called impervious surfaces)

- Lawns that are chemically dependant and require intensive management

When natural vegetation is removed and the amount of impervious surface increases, there is less water allowed to infiltrate through the soil.

Therefore, the amount of water entering our lakes has increases. The run-off often contains contaminants and pollutants from everyday lawn care practices, such as the use of weed and insect control chemicals, fertilizers, and household wastes such as leaking automobile fluids and animal waste.

A return to the old-fashioned way of maintaining a lawn may be the best "new" way to help protect our lakes from pollution.

This method is to make lawn care as simple as possible. It may take some time and effort to adopt all the practices of a low-maintenance lawn.

However, by following the alternatives listed below, you can minimize your impact on lake and river water quality. Consider the following:

- Use weed killers and other pesticides sparingly (apply only to trouble spots not the entire lawn).

- Limit lawn fertilizer treatments and choose fertilizers that does not contain phosphorus which can lead to increased algae growth in receiving waters.

- Keep grass clippings on your lawn and do not rake leaves or grass into the street. Sweep up and compost clippings that fall on the sidewalk, driveway or street.

- Clean up animal waste quickly from your lawn, driveway or sidewalk.

- Clean up oil and antifreeze from your driveway immediately after they spill.

- Keep a healthy perspective. A perfect lawn doesn't seem as nice when maintaining it harms the lakes and streams.

For suggestions on methods to care for your lawn and improve run-off quality, please contact Randy Anhorn, administrator/limnologist at the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District office at 651-209-9753.

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