

Follow the Flow—From your Lush, Green Lawn

Summer is coming—finally! And with summer comes the season of lawn care—mowing, fertilizing, and watering. Before you hit the lawn with spring fertilizer, *follow the flow* during one of our spring rains and see where the water goes as it leaves your lawn. In urban areas, water flows to the storm drain, where it connects directly to the nearest lake, river, or stream. This means that anything we put on our lawn—fertilizer, pesticides, pet waste— can run off and enter our water resources. Once in our water, these pollutants fuel weed and algae growth and poison aquatic habitats.

Organic lawn care practices avoid dangerous chemicals and run-off creating a healthier environment. Here are some simple tips to a healthier, more natural lawn.

1. **Test your soil.** Before using fertilizers, test your soil. It is a simple procedure that explains exactly how much fertilizer is actually needed to support the growth of grass. Lack of soil testing may result in excess application and water pollution.
2. **Set realistic expectations.** Do you need a completely weed free lawn? Realize that weeds are a symptom. The problem could be soil compaction—not a lack of nutrients. Test your soil to treat the problem—not the symptom.
3. **Mow high.** Set your lawn mower blade at 3". The longer grass will shade out weed sprouts and compete better against the weeds. Mow often enough to avoid removal of more than 1/3 of the grass blade—this will stress your grass, resulting in increased susceptibility to weeds.
4. **Let it go.** Unless caring for newly established lawn, allow the lawn to go dormant during hot, dry times. This will not harm the grass and will save money on the water bill. If watering is required, water only one inch, once per week and use a rain gauge to measure the amount applied. Frequent watering promotes shallow roots and can harm your lawn.
5. **Clean up!** After fertilizing or mowing the lawn, be sure to sweep any leftovers off the pavement and back onto the lawn. Fertilizers and grass clippings will wash into the storm drain and fuel weed and algae growth in local lakes and rivers.

These are just a few tips to get started on having a healthy lawn that you and your family can touch, enjoy, and even sit on. Look for more information on our website at www.waukeshacounty.gov/cleanwater.