

Clean Water, Healthy Lawns

Yes! We can have healthy lawns and clean water in our lakes and rivers—at the same time! All it takes is a little lawn care savvy and patience. Let's start with the savvy. Before you do anything on your lawn, you need to understand that when it rains, water flows off your lawn, over the curb and into the storm drain. Storm drains are connected to the nearest lake, river or stream. This means that anything we put on our lawn—fertilizers, pesticides, weed and feed—can run off our lawn and enter our waters.

Now for the patience. There are some simple steps to maintaining a beautiful lawn without harming our waters. It will take some time to apply them all—and get results, so be patient!

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. Excess application results in water pollution.
2. **Set realistic expectations.** Is a completely weed free lawn necessary? 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 which will stress your grass, resulting in increased susceptibility to weeds.
5. **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 that can harm your lawn.
6. **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 is safe for your children and pets as well as our waters. For more in depth information visit www.waukeshacountygov/cleanwater and attend a Clean Water, Healthy Lawns workshop.

