

Lawn Care, Fertilizer and Water Pollution

KEEP THE STORM DRAINS CLEAN FOR THOSE DOWNSTREAM

Natural methods of lawn care in conjunction with chemicals can produce a healthy lawn and protect water quality.

The overuse of lawn fertilizers and weed killers can harm streams, rivers, and ponds. Sole reliance on chemicals is no longer recommended for maintaining a beautiful lawn. Instead, natural methods of lawn care in conjunction with chemicals can produce a healthy lawn and protect water quality. Certain grasses can filter pollutants (fertilizers, herbicides, sediment) and some types can control weeds while requiring less fertilizer and water. Here are some tips:

Mowing

- ◆ Don't mow too close to the ground; taller grass produces deeper roots and controls weeds.
- ◆ Practice "grasscycling", and leave clippings on the lawn to provide natural fertilization (do not blow them into ditches or streams).
- ◆ Do not mow wet grass; this causes clumping.
- ◆ Use composted yard waste as mulch and soil conditioner.

Fertilizers

Fertilizers contain nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus) that can harm water quality by causing undesirable plants to grow in streams and ponds, blocking oxygen from the fish. Fertilizers high in nitrates (nitrogen) are more likely to enter streams because they are released more quickly. Here are some best management practices:

- ◆ Apply according to label directions. Do not apply fertilizer:
 - when the ground is frozen.
 - before or after heavy rain or irrigation.
 - during cold weather (less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit).
 - directly into, or near, streams, ponds, or ditches.
- ◆ Minimize application rates on slopes.
- ◆ Use fertilizers labeled "slowly-available nitrogen" on sandy soils, since they are less likely to enter streams.
- ◆ Base fertilizer applications on a representative soil test that shows the amounts of nutrients in the soil, waiting three to four weeks after the last fertilization.
- ◆ Aerate compacted soil to aid incorporation of fertilizer and reduce runoff.
- ◆ Maintain a vegetated buffer zone between frequently fertilized lawns and streams to prevent pollution and provide uptake of nutrients.
- ◆ Water carefully to prevent runoff and leaching.
- ◆ Water in the early morning for optimal results.
- ◆ Follow local applicable water use restrictions.

For further information, contact the Installation's Environmental Branch at 767-2010.



Improving Storm Water Quality