

Yard Care

Mowing, raking, gardening...these tips will keep your lawn and garden growing and keep pollutants out of lakes and streams.

Leaves, Leaves Everywhere. Follow these suggestions for [fall leaf cleanup](#).

Grass clippings. Leave it be. After you mow, you can leave the grass clippings on the lawn where they will act as a natural fertilizer. It's good for the lawn and much less work than bagging them up and hauling them away. If you just love to rake and bag up your grass clippings, you can use grass clippings as mulch in your vegetable garden. It will help hold moisture in and keep the weeds down.



Fertilizer. When the nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizer washes into lakes and streams they create harmful algae blooms and aquatic weed growth. They also lower the dissolved oxygen levels in the water and they may release ammonia, which is toxic to fish. What can you do?



- Test the soil. Before planting a garden or fertilizing your lawn, have your parent get the soil tested. That way you're not guessing and you won't add too much fertilizer.
- Fertilize in the fall. Fall is the best time to fertilize your lawn. It promotes healthy lawns with deep roots.
- Sweep up any extra fertilizer that lands on your sidewalk or driveway. You should also sweep up soil, grass clippings and leaves which also contain nitrogen and phosphorus. This will keep them from washing down the storm sewers into nearby waterways.

Pesticides. Pesticides kill pests. That seems simple, doesn't it. But, pesticides can also hurt pets and other plants and animals that you don't want to kill. Pesticides can be herbicides (which kill plants), insecticides (which kill insects) and fungicides (which kill fungi.)

How can you cut down or eliminate the use of pesticides?

- Plant disease resistant varieties of plants.



- Clean up pest infested plant waste in the fall. This keeps diseases from overwintering in your garden or lawn.
- Pick weeds by hand! (Wow, you mean people still do that?)
- Do your best to keep birds and other natural pest predators visiting your yard.
- Use mulches to hold down weeds, conserve moisture, and prevent soil from washing away.

Pet waste. Do you own a dog or a cat? What's your favorite pet chore? It's probably not picking up dog poop or cleaning the litter box. But, it's important that you take care when disposing of pet waste.



When pet waste is washed into lakes or streams the waste decays, using up oxygen. It also contains nutrients that cause weeds and algae to grow. Overly fertile water becomes cloudy and green and is not someplace you'd want to swim. And, pet waste can carry diseases which makes water unsafe for swimming and drinking.

Be sure to dispose of your pet's waste properly--just flush it down the toilet. When flushing, keep cat litter and other debris like sticks out before flushing. You can also bury pet waste as long as you're careful to keep it away from vegetable gardens and any lake, stream, or well. In many places it is illegal to put pet waste in the trash.

Plant a rain garden. Gather your family together and start gardening--rain gardening that is. A rain garden soaks up rain that normally would runoff your land from your roof and lawn. By planting wildflowers and other native vegetation, your rain garden will be able to hold water and release it slowly, instead of having it rush over your roof, down your gutters, into the street, into the storm sewer and eventually into a lake or stream. 💧💧

Now that you've followed the [path to cleaner water](#), you can try these easy tips for [conserving water](#) in your home.