

# Town of Leesburg News

## Stormwater Pollution by Lawn Care

### Why can Lawn Care be a Stormwater Runoff Problem?

As we get into the warmer months, many people are busy doing yard work to build or keep a green lawn. However, some methods of attaining the ideal lawn can actually be harmful to the environment. According to EPA, when excessive amounts of lawn fertilizers and pesticides are applied to lawns and gardens, they can wash off, enter the storm drainage system and pollute waterways downstream.

In addition, grass clippings and leaves can wash into storm drains, clogging them, and leading to flooding. They also contribute excess nutrients and organic matter to streams. These nutrients cause excessive algae growth, which blocks sunlight, depletes oxygen and kills fish and other aquatic life.

Most people are unaware of environmental consequences of their lawn care practices – but they do make a difference! Below are some ways you can help be more eco-friendly and reduce stormwater pollution:

- Adoption of environmentally–friendly lawn care and conservation practices such as using organic products or natural fertilizers as opposed to chemical-based ones, composting, selecting native plants and grasses and soil testing to determine the actual needs of the soil you are working with can significantly reduce downstream water pollution.
- Fertilize in the fall instead of the spring – this helps lawns recover from the harsh heat of the summer while building strong roots over the winter for next spring.
- Proper application of fertilizer and use of the correct amount of fertilizer based on soil testing – the Loudoun County Extension Office can offer assistance with soil testing and organic/natural lawn care methods for our area. They can be reached at 703-777-0373.
- Don't over water your lawn - consider using soaker hose instead of a sprinkler. Also, avoid letting water runoff down sidewalks and driveways into storm sewers – this carries dirt, debris and any chemicals on the ground into the storm sewer system and eventually downstream.
- Use organic mulch when available/feasible. Other mulches may be chemically treated and as they break down or get washed away, those chemical can have an impact on water quality downstream.
- Compost or mulch yard waste – consider the “mow it high and let it lie” method. Using a mulching mower and keeping grass heights taller means less water is required – and the grass clippings act as their own fertilizer, returning nutrients to the lawn – meaning less water and fertilizer are needed!
- Don't leave yard waste in the street or sweep it into storm drains or streams. Storm drains and the sewer system are designed for moving water – not yard waste or trash! Leaves and grass clippings don't immediately break down, thereby clogging the drains and outlets, which can lead to flooding. In addition, downstream outfalls cannot handle the extra nutrients that come from the grass clippings and leaves.

- Cover piles of dirt or mulch being used in landscaping projects. If you have more material delivered than you can distribute in one day, plan on having a tarp to cover the pile with. Otherwise, showers and storms can wash the material into the sewer system, negatively impacting waterways downstream and washing away your investment!

For more information on educational outreach programs, including volunteer opportunities, contact the Town of Leesburg Department of Public Works at 703-771-2790, via e-mail at [publicworks@leesburgva.gov](mailto:publicworks@leesburgva.gov), or visit [www.leesburgva.gov](http://www.leesburgva.gov).