



MINNESOTA WATER
LET'S KEEP IT CLEAN

Summer Lawn Care Tip Sheet

Here are tips for protecting water quality in our lakes, streams and rivers during the season when we use them most. Summer is prime time for maintaining cars and boats, but some activities can harm our lakes, streams and rivers. Here's how to prevent that:

- Avoid washing your car on paved surfaces such as streets and driveways, where the dirty soapy water flows into storm drains. Wash cars on your lawn or take them to commercial car washes, which are an environmentally friendly alternative because the water drains into sanitary sewers and is treated before discharge.
- Recycle used motor oil. Never spill gasoline, motor oil, washer fluid, antifreeze or other products on hard surfaces. They will flow through storm sewers to our lakes, creeks and rivers and are harmful to fish, plants and other aquatic life.
- Don't litter. Recycle bottles and cans. Put trash from your car in the garage. Shake and wash floor mats over your lawn, not hard surfaces.
- Dispose of cigarette butts properly. Do not throw them out car windows or onto sidewalks. Nicotine is a poison that can harm aquatic life. When soil washes down ditches it flows directly into our lakes, streams and rivers. Soil particles contain phosphorus. In the water, phosphorus feeds algae and lowers water quality. Here's what you can do to keep soil out of the water:
 - Keep your lawn healthy and reseed any bare spots. Plant flowers or other ground covers in open soil.
 - If you have a Blooming Boulevard, maintain a turf border or edging around it to keep the soil in place.
 - When you're done with yard work clean your lawn and garden equipment on the grass, not on hard surfaces. Sweep up soil and grass clippings. Never wash or blow them into the street. There's phosphorus in organic debris too, so it lowers water quality as well. Here's how to keep organic debris out of our lakes, streams and rivers.
 - Near hard surfaces, use wood shavings or other organic mulches that knit together when wet and stay put during heavy rains.
 - Leaves, twigs, tree flowers and other organic debris accumulates on roofs and in gutters. Keep it from washing into the street by directing your downspouts away from buildings and onto grass or ground cover, where the nutrients will be absorbed and recycled. If you live near a storm sewer grate, remove debris after every rain. Bag it and place in garbage. Be sure to wear gloves.
 - Debris can clog storm drains and cause street flooding.
 - Pet waste can contain harmful bacteria as well as nutrients. Pick up pet waste promptly. Double bag and put in the garbage. Never drop pet waste in the street or ditches. One more tip for protecting our lakes, streams and rivers:
 - Don't apply fertilizer or treat dandelions during the hot days of the summer. Fall is the best time to fertilize your lawn and treat broadleaf weeds.

For additional tips about how to protect Minnesota's waterways at home visit the Minnesota Department of Agriculture's Web site at www.mda.state.mn.us and click on the Water and Land section's Lawn Care and Water Quality pages.

Green up your lawn

Keep grass clippings out of the street! Leave your clippings on the lawn whenever possible. Mulching mowers and mulching attachments for mowers reduce the size of grass clippings, thus increasing the rate at which they decompose. Mowing on a regular basis with a sharp mower blade produces clippings that decompose fairly quickly. They do not contribute to thatch build-up because when they decompose they become a valuable organic source of nutrients for grass plants. In fact, yearly nitrogen applications may be reduced by 1/3 to 1/2 when grass clippings are left on the lawn.



Stop running your sprinklers in the rain! If you have a timer that lets your sprinklers do the thinking for you, buy a rain sensor at your local garden center for about \$20 and end the insanity.



Water the lawn, not the pavement! If you are going to use a sprinkler to water your lawn or garden, please, check to ensure that you are not watering your driveway, the road, or your neighbor's face. For gardens, many people find that soaker hoses are more effective than sprinklers at getting the water to your plants.

Don't let your lawn become a swimming pool! Grass is not an aquatic plant, and it does not need to be saturated in water 24 hours a day to survive. In fact, the roots of turf grass cannot absorb more than 1 inch of water at a time. Try this silly trick to keep from over-watering your lawn. Place an empty tuna can in an unobtrusive location on your lawn before you turn the sprinklers on. When it is full, the grass has had enough water. When all of the water in the can evaporates, it is time to water again. (Note that you might not have to water more than once a week, or at all if it rains!)

Avoid scorching your lawn! The roots of turf grass are generally as long as the above ground height of the lawn. That means that the taller your grass is, the better it can absorb water and the greener it will be. Taller grass also makes it harder for weeds to germinate. When you do mow the lawn, set your cut height a bit higher (2.5 – 3.5 inches) to avoid scorching.

Soften your soil! Does it seem like all the water you are dumping on your lawn is just running off into the street? It's not your imagination! The soil beneath most residential lawns is highly compacted, almost like rock, meaning that it can absorb little water. You can reduce soil compaction and improve infiltration in your lawn by renting a lawn aerator from a local garden supply store. If you are laying new sod this summer, deeply till the soil before hand to encourage good root growth.

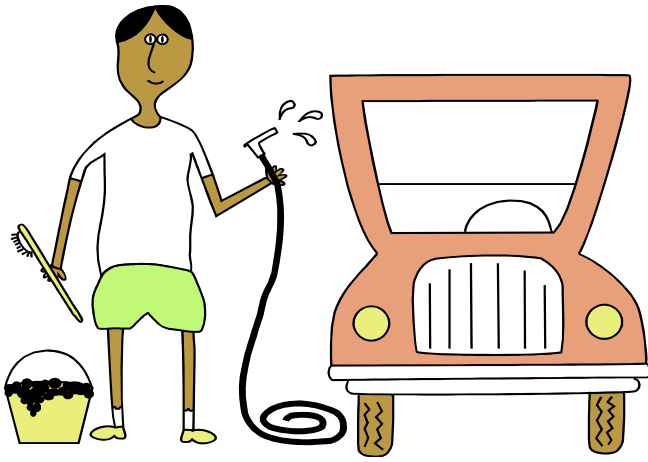


Apply pesticides only to areas where pests are evident rather than to an entire lawn. Proper timing of pesticide applications is crucial to their overall effectiveness against pests and to minimize adverse environmental impacts. For example, fall is the best time to control perennial broadleaf weeds, such as dandelions or creeping charlie. From mid-September to early October, these plants grow actively and more readily take up an herbicide.

For information about how to use pesticides – and alternatives to pesticides - effectively and safely, call [National Pesticide Information Center](http://www.nationalpesticideinformationcenter.org) from 8:30 AM to 6:30 PM seven days a week (except holidays) at 1-800-858-7378.

If you see pesticide misuse (spilled product that is not cleaned up, unlabeled pesticide containers being sold in stores, pesticides applications that drift over to neighboring property and cause damage, etc.), contact the Minnesota Department of Agriculture at 651-201-6696 Monday thru Friday from 8 AM to 4:00 PM.

After hours, complaints can be reported to the [Minnesota Duty Officer](http://www.mn.gov) at 800-422-0798 in greater Minnesota and 651-649-5451 in the metro area.



If cleaning your car at home

HERE ARE SOME WASHING YOUR CAR TIPS

Commercial car wash facilities often recycle their water or are required to send their wash water to the wastewater treatment plant, so if at all possible, use a facility to keep your car clean.

Out of doors, go out of your way

If you must wash your car out of doors, here are a few tips to minimize negative impacts:

- Remove all trash and debris from the car washing area
- Use only soap or detergent labeled "non-toxic," "phosphate free," or "biodegradable;" The safest products for the environment are vegetable-based or citrus-based soaps
- Do not use acid based wheel cleaners or engine degreasers
- Select a site where the wash water can soak into grass, gravel, or be diverted to nearby landscaping. This will allow the wash water to filter through the vegetation and/or soil instead of flowing directly into the storm drain
- Drive the car onto a piece of plywood or direct the wheels onto 1x8s to minimize soil compaction from the weight of the automobile
- If you select a site that drains into a street, block off the storm drain with sandbags and either divert the wash water to an area where the water can pool and evaporate throughout the day
- Shake car mats into a trash can or vacuum them - do not shake dirt from car mats directly onto the ground
- Use a bucket of soapy water to re-soap rags or sponges throughout the wash rather than adding more soap directly to rags or sponges
- Wring sponges and wash rags into buckets, not the ground
- Conserve water by using a spray nozzle with an automatic shut off and shutting off or kinking the hose when not in use
- Always empty buckets into the sanitary sewer system (e.g. sinks or toilets)