

What You Can Do for Water Quality:

Spring Yardwork That's Stream-Friendly

Winter's freeze is here, and many people are longing for green grass and the warm smell of fresh earth. Along with spring, of course, comes yardwork. This year, take some steps that protect your local stream.

Contain Your Yard "Waste"

Grass clippings, leaves, and other yard "waste" cause problems when they wash into streams. Decomposing in the stream, yard waste robs fish and other aquatic life of oxygen, and releases nutrients that feed aquatic weed growth. Keep yard waste out of the streams by mowing often enough so you don't have to rake grass clippings. If you must rake, compost the clippings, along with your leaves and organic kitchen waste, and use the mulch around the yard. Avoid placing yard waste, including the ashes from burn piles, in roadside ditches where it can wash directly into the lakes.

Erosion fills the lakes with sediment. Disturb no more ground than necessary for a construction project, and try to preserve existing vegetation. Seed bare soil and cover it with a mulch as soon as possible to minimize erosion. And don't overlook landscaping with native plants. Plants stabilize soil and offer an excellent way to use your compost. Homeowners with waterfront property can grow a "buffer strip" of dense, native plants along the water's edge to stabilize their shoreline. Native plants can save you time because they often need less care than traditional species, and usually require little or no pesticides and fertilizers to stay healthy – a bonus for water quality.

Use Pesticides and Fertilizers Sparingly

The adage "more-is-better" doesn't apply for pesticides and fertilizers. Read the label carefully before using these products. Applying too much, or at the wrong time, threatens lake quality and wastes your money. It only takes a moderate rain to wash improperly applied pesticides and fertilizers into roadside ditches that drain directly to the lakes.

For fertilizers, early October or late May are good times to treat your lawn. Early spring applications promote more top (blade) growth than root growth and shallow roots can't sustain lawns through dry spells or harsh winters. The best times for pesticide use vary, depending on the pest. Again, make sure you read the label first.

(Source: University of Wisconsin Extension)