

Water Quality & Your Lawn: Protecting and Improving Water Quality

The water purifying abilities of your lawn.

You may already know that well-maintained lawns and landscapes can add up to 15 percent to a property's value. But did you know that a dense, healthy turf is also an environmental hero? According to a recent Gallup survey, only 23 percent of Americans recognize turf's environmental benefits. *You can do your part protecting and improving the environment by maintaining your own yard properly with these basic guidelines.*

Healthy Lawns Improve Water Quality.

Lawns help keep our lakes and streams clean by allowing rainwater to filter into the soil rather than running into storm sewers and washing away valuable soil. Healthy, dense lawns absorb rainfall, preventing runoff and erosion.

Furthermore, according to scientific research, turf promotes high populations of microorganisms in the thatch layer and topsoil. These microorganisms break down impurities, making turf an excellent water filter.

Studies at several nationally recognized universities have documented that well-managed turf has a greater capacity for absorbing and holding water than any other ground cover. The result? Less runoff and better water quality.

And, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, "Thick grass prevents soil erosion, filters contaminants from rainwater, and absorbs many types of airborne pollutants, like dust and soot. Grass is also highly efficient at converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, a process that helps clean the air."

Encouraging and Nurturing Your Lawn's Environmental Qualities

Practice preventive turf health care today. Here are a few pointers:

Soil — Consider having your soil sampled and analyzed. Work with a professional to amend the soil to the correct pH level and key nutrients for healthy growth.

Grass — Planting the proper grass variety adapted for your climate is vital to lawn success. Contact your lawn care professional for appropriate local information.

Mowing — Mow at the highest recommended height (usually 3 inches) and mow frequently: every five days when the lawn is growing fast, and up to 10 days when it is growing more slowly. Never remove more than one-third of the leaf surface. Keep lawn mower blades sharp and leave clippings on the lawn (grasscycling) when you mow. This allows nutrients to return to the soil. Make sure you don't leave clippings on the pavement where they can wash off into a water source and contribute to water pollution.

Watering —Water deeply every 5 – 7 days in the early morning. In general, watering should moisten the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. This requires applying a half-inch of water on coarse, sandy soil and 1 inch on heavy- or fine-textured soil. Too much water can cause water quality and grass problems, which increases the chance of fungus, runoff, and leaching of nutrients. It's also a waste of our precious water resources.

Fertilization and Pest Control — Apply the right amount and kind of fertilizer and pest-control products at the right time, and only when needed. Follow *all* label instructions and precautions. Work with a lawn care professional to create an effective program specific to your needs.

More Helpful Tips For Protecting Water Resources

- Calibrate your fertilizer spreader so that an appropriate amount of product is used. Only fertilize at proper times of the year.
- Use tin cans spaced across the lawn during a watering session to estimate how many inches of water are being applied to the lawn per minute and adjust calibration accordingly.
- Measure your lawn properly before any application. Maintain the per-1,000-square-foot recommendations for each lawn care product.
- Keep lawn products on the turf, not the pavement where it can wash into a water source. If products do get on the pavement, sweep them back onto the lawn.
- Correctly identify any weed, insect, or disease before selecting a treatment method. If using pest-control products, consider spot applications when necessary. For highest effectiveness with the least amount of product, consult a professional.

If you need advice or assistance with proper turf-management practices, contact a lawn care provider or your local county cooperative extension service.

Additionally, before hiring a professional to help maintain your lawn and landscape, check the company's credentials and references. To help in your selection, take a look at "Tips for Homeowners" on *LandcareNetwork.org*.

By following proper turf-management practices, you can enjoy your lawn and protect the environment.

Supporting Organizations for "Water Quality & Your Lawn":

The Lawn Institute

Water Environment Federation

U.S. Department of Agriculture

The Environmental Protection Agency

EPA's Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program

The National Foundation for Integrated Pest Management Education

Project EverGreen

National Association of County Agricultural Agents

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Professional Landcare Network

950 Herndon Parkway, Suite 450

Herndon, VA 20170

(800) 395-2522

LandcareNetwork.org

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