

Tips to Use Less Fertilizers & Chemical in the Yard

Lawn and Yard Care - Pollution Prevention

Here are some tips for lawn and yard care that will help keep your yard healthy and reduce stormwater pollution.

Test your soil for pH and nutrients.

- Applying more fertilizer than you need is a waste of your money. Extra nutrients wash into storm drains and pollute local streams.
- Soil testing involves three steps: 1) obtain a box and instructions for mailing a soil sample, 2) gather samples of soil from around the yard, 3) send the kit in for testing, and 4) receive results.
- Request a soil test box and instructions from the Mecklenburg County Soil & Water Conservation District (704)336-2455 or the Mecklenburg County Extension office (704) 336-2082.

Keep your soil healthy.

- Healthy soil prevents the need to apply fertilizer or chemicals to keep weeds and pests away.
- Add compost and organic fertilizer to the garden each year.
- For lawns, aerate soil, overseed, and top-dress with compost.

Mow grass 2 inches or higher.

- Longer grass blades equal deeper roots and a healthier lawn.
- Lawns cut to less than 2 inches are more susceptible to weeds and then need more chemicals for weed control.

Use grass clippings and/or slow-release fertilizers.

- Clippings left on the lawn decompose quickly and are a natural fertilizer.
- Clippings left on the lawn do not cause crabgrass.
- Use slow-release fertilizers if you need an artificial fertilizer.

Use physical controls for pests; not chemical ones.

- Thick layers of mulch, compost or bark prevent weeds.
- Traps, like sticky wraps or pheromone bags, for pest control.
- Barriers and screens, like floating row covers, seedling collars and cheesecloth, block pests from getting to plants.
- Biological controls:
 - Milky spore, a natural disease, to get rid of Japanese beetles
 - Beneficial insects, like ladybugs, green lacewings, predatory mites and parasitic nematodes, will eat other insects and not our plants.
- Natural products:

Tips to Use Less Fertilizers & Chemical in the Yard

- Horticultural oils. Best for ornamental plants.
- Insecticidal soap. It controls aphids, mites and whiteflies.
- Neem seed extract. It works as a repellent, growth regulator and insect poison.
- Diatomaceous earth. It is used for insect and mite management.

Reduce the lawn and add native plants.

- Lawns require more care, nutrients, chemicals and water than native trees, ground covers, bushes and plants.
- Native trees are more resistant to local pests and diseases, and require less care, chemicals and water than exotic varieties. [Native Tree List](#)

Plant ground cover on slopes.

- Ground cover on slopes controls erosion better than grass reducing the chance of weeds or need for herbicides.

Prune Plants.

- Healthy plants require less chemicals and nutrients.
- Prune plants so they can best use energy sources.
- Shear off dead or diseased portions. They are more attractive to pests.