



"Green" Yard Care Tips

The following provides tips for lawn and yard care that will help keep your yard healthy and reduce stormwater pollution.

1) 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 four 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
4. Receive results and only apply nutrients needed.

Request a soil test box and instructions from the Mecklenburg County Soil & Water Conservation District at (704)336-2455 or the Mecklenburg County Extension office (704) 336-2082.

2) 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.

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) 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.



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- Use 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.
- Use natural products:
 - 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.

6) 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](#)

7) Plant ground cover on slopes

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

8) 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.