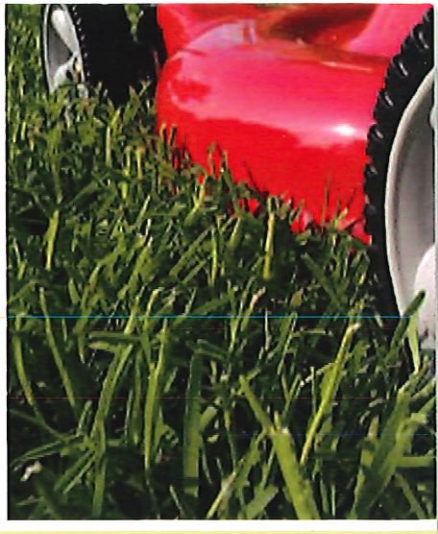

Caring for your yard means caring about our environment, especially when it comes to soil and water resources. The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) provides national leadership and a unified voice for natural resource conservation. The 3,000-member conservation districts and individual members help local communities protect and conserve America's land, water, forests, wildlife, and related natural resources.

Conservation goes hand-in-hand with good lawn care practices that protect and improve water quality. By using proper feeding and mowing practices, we all can enjoy healthy lawns and conserve our natural resources for future generations.

NACD and your local conservation district have great resources to help you protect the environment, starting with these simple lawn care practices.

CONSERVATION BEGINS IN YOUR BACKYARD

- **Healthy soil** is the foundation of a good lawn. Healthy soil supports earthworms, microbes and beneficial insects that improve soil structure, air and water flow, and plant growth.
- For mature grass, **always choose a fertilizer that is phosphorus-free**, unless a soil test shows a need for this nutrient. Generally, only new grass plants require additional phosphorus for initial root growth.
- **The best time to feed is in spring and fall** when the grass is actively growing.
- Use a drop spreader or **rotary spreader with a side guard** to keep fertilizer on the grass.
- **Set your mower at its highest setting.*** Taller grass is stronger grass. It builds deeper roots that enable the plant to find water and nutrients and better withstand periods of heat and drought.
- **Use a mulching mower,** so that grass clippings can be returned to the soil where they will break down and add nutrients and organic matter to the soil.
- In the fall, **mulch leaves using your lawn mower.** Leaves will break down and enrich the soil.
- **Sweep leaves, grass clippings, and fertilizer** that land on driveways and sidewalks back on to the grass to help keep nutrients out of waterways

WATER RESOURCES AND YOUR LAWN

- Conserve water by using rainfall as much as possible to water your lawn. Most of the U.S. receives enough natural rainfall to support grass growth without supplemental water.
- Let the rain soak in. Direct downspouts out into the lawn, rain gardens, and rain barrels.
- Its okay to let your established lawn go dormant during a dry spell. Grass plants are resilient and will grow again when the rain returns.
- Storm sewers often lead directly in streams and lakes. Never dispose of clippings or pet wastes in or around sewers or water resources, such as rivers, lakes and streams. Make it a habit to sweep up any fertilizer, grass clippings, and leaves.
- If your lawn borders water, do not mow or fertilize to the water's edge. Create a buffer zone with uncut grass or other vegetation to prevent soil erosion.

*Bermudagrass, seashore paspalum, and zoysia: mow at two inch height.

LAWN FACTS

- The millions of grass plants in your lawn help clean the air, trap dirt, and remove carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. The grass roots and soil microbes act as a natural water filter to capture and break down pollutants.
- 90% of the weight of a grass plant is in its roots. This keeps the soil in place to prevent erosion. Lawns are over 2,000 times more effective at preventing erosion than bare soil.
- Grass is one of the best ground covers for absorbing water. Healthy grass can absorb most of the runoff from roofs, patios, driveways, sidewalks, and streets that would otherwise go directly into storm sewers, lakes, and streams.

KEEPING RAINWATER IN PLACE

Rainwater that falls on your roof is usually directed away from your yard, and it typically moves down the curb into the street. This water and the pollution load it picks up go into the nearest storm sewer and, from there, to the nearest stream or river. You can help keep stormwater on your property and pollutants out of the waterways by using rainwater the way nature intended - to water the grass, trees, and plants in your yard.

SIMPLE STEPS FOR LAWNS, WATER, AND YOUR COMMUNITY

- **Mow High:** Longer grass is stronger grass: it shades the soils, prevents weed seed germination, grows deeper roots, and better absorbs and filters rainfall.
- **Mulch clippings:** Leave clippings on the lawn. Grass clippings quickly breakdown and return valuable nutrients and organic matter back into the soil where earthworms and microbes thrive. Rich soil helps absorb and filter rainfall reducing erosion and run-off.
- **Use the right fertilizer:** Always choose a lawn fertilizer that is phosphorus-free, unless a soil test shows a need for this nutrient.
- **Clean up:** Keep grass clipping, leaves, and fertilizer off of sidewalks, roadways and other hard surfaces and out of our waterways.

WORKING TOGETHER TO CONSERVE

OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

THE Scotts Miracle-Gro COMPANY

National Association of Conservation Districts
conserving natural resources
for our future

BACKYARD CONSERVATION:
Lawns and the Environment

How proper lawn care can help protect our natural resources