

Healthy Yards, Clean Streams

No matter how close you live to a stream, the way you take care of your lawn has a big effect on your local streams. What you spray or spread on your lawn affects the quality of the creek's water and the plants and wildlife that depend on it. Storms wash lawn care chemicals into streams and pollute them, particularly if these products are not properly applied. Many insect and weed killers broadcast over lawns affect the soil as well. They harm the micro-organisms that give soil life, creating nutrients for plants and texture to improve the soil's ability to absorb and retain water. Pesticides applied to shrubs may harm beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, and the birds which feed on them.

Here are some tips for a thicker, healthier, more environmentally-friendly lawn:

- Mow lawns high (2 ½ to 3 inch height) to reduce the chance of weeds taking hold.
- Go easy on the nitrogen. Healthy lawns need about 4 pounds of nitrogen per square foot over the growing season; more than that creates excessive growth and fertilizer runoff during storms. By leaving mulched grass clippings on the lawn, you reduce this need by 25%. Check that you or your lawn care service are not exceeding the amount of nitrogen your lawn needs.
- Select a slow-release fertilizer with a high percentage of Water Insoluble Nitrogen, and without any broadleaf weedkiller listed on the label. Since slow-release fertilizer breaks down gradually in soil, rather than quickly dissolving in stormwater, it is less likely to wash into your local streams. Hand pull or spot spray emerging weeds with products specific for that problem.



For more information on managing your lawn, visit the Penn State Extension website at plantscience.psu.edu/research/centers/turf/extension/home-lawns.