



The benefits of an attractive yard go beyond impressing the neighbors!

Healthy lawns and landscaping can make a yard look attractive while improving your property value. Simple measures to maintain your yard can also reduce erosion and nutrient runoff and improve water quality in nearby lakes and streams. This brochure contains a few easy tips for homeowners that will keep local water resources clean.

“Think green” when gardening and follow these simple recommendations to protect local water resources



Contact your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office for additional information on soil testing and garden practices.



This brochure was created by the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board as part of a public stormwater education program jointly funded by the following municipalities: the Towns of Camillus, Clay, Dewitt, Geddes, LaFayette, Liverpool, Lysander, Manlius, Marcellus, Onondaga, Salina, Sullivan, Van Buren, Hastings, Cicero, West Monroe, and Pompey, the Villages of Baldwinsville, East Syracuse,

Phoenix, Fayetteville, Manlius, Marcellus, Minoa, North Syracuse, Solvay, the City of Syracuse, and Madison and Onondaga Counties.

Landscaping Tips

Ten convenient ways to achieve a beautiful yard while protecting the environment



Ten environmental tips for maintaining a healthy, attractive yard and garden

Test your soil before applying fertilizer. Commercial fertilizers often contain high levels of phosphorus, but most soils in central New York have adequate levels of the nutrient to maintain a healthy lawn. Excess fertilizer applied to your lawn and garden can flow into the storm sewer system and end up in local lakes and streams where it promotes the growth of unwanted algae and aquatic plants. Look for low- or no-phosphorus products when applying fertilizer and carefully follow the application rates found on the bag.

Check your soil pH. Proper pH levels will improve the efficiency of the nutrient absorption in your lawn and garden, thereby saving you time and money. Lime should be used to adjust the pH of the soil to between 6.5 and 7.2.



Never apply fertilizer before a rainstorm. Heavy rainfall can cause excess fertilizer to flow into the storm sewer system and end up in local lakes and streams. Save time and money by applying a slow-release fertilizer in the early spring and allowing time for gradual soil infiltration.

Mow your lawn at regular intervals. Proper mowing is the most effective way to maintain a healthy lawn. The root system binds the soil to reduce the flow of water during heavy rainstorms. This minimizes soil erosion, nutrient loss, and excess strain on local storm sewers. A healthy lawn also contains bacteria and other microscopic organisms that filter pollutants as the water moves through the soil.



Leave the clippings on the lawn after mowing. This will save time and money and will promote a healthy turf. Grass clippings return organic matter, nitrogen, phosphorus, and other nutrients to your lawn, thereby reducing the need for fertilizer applications throughout the summer. Studies have shown that grass recycling reduces the need for fertilizer by 25%. If the grass gets too high, then mow over the clippings to shred and scatter them.

Conserve water. Water your lawn and garden plants in the early morning or late afternoon to minimize water loss from evaporation, and sweep your sidewalks and driveways rather than using a hose. Divert roof water to lawns or gardens to further conserve water and reduce storm-water runoff. Washing your car on grass or gravel will reduce runoff while promoting soil infiltration.

Cover piles of soil, sand, and mulch to prevent erosion. Wind and rain can transport this material from your yard into nearby lakes and streams, where it reduces aquatic habitat and promotes unwanted weed and algae growth.

Create a compost pile. Put leaves and other yard waste in a compost pile. Place the compost at the base of vegetable plants, flowers, or shrubs to recycle nutrients and organic matter, minimize soil erosion, and reduce the need for commercial fertilizer.

Limit your use of pesticides. Inappropriate use of pesticides can harm humans, pets, and the environment. Use alternatives (biological controls) whenever possible to tackle problems with weeds and insects. If pesticides are used, carefully follow the recommended timing, frequency, and application rates found on the container.

Recycle or dispose of yard, household, and automotive chemicals with care. Keep gardening products, pet waste, pesticides, oil, and gasoline, out of the storm drains. These products will contaminate groundwater resources if they are poured on the lawn or driveway.

