Clean Water
Landscaping Practices

WHY DOES IT MATTER?
Every lawn is connected to a lake, stream, or wetland. How we manage our lawns adds up to a big impact on the watershed, for better or worse. Unfortunately lawns can be a source of excess nutrients and sediment that harm water resources. But a good looking lawn that’s good for the watershed is possible.

WATERING & MOWING
• Set the mower blade at a minimum of 3”, mow 1/3 of the blade at a time to avoid stressing the grass.
• Keep the mower blades sharp.
• Water according to the life cycle of grass. In spring and fall, water deeper and infrequently (6-8”/week). In summer, water shallow and more frequently (2-3”/week). Grass typically needs just 1”/week to stay green.
• Let grass go dormant in late summer.
• Water in the early morning or evening to reduce water loss from evaporation.
• Always sweep or blow grass clippings off hard surfaces and back onto lawns. Plant and cover up bare soil.

FERTILIZER & AERATION
• Leave grass clippings on the lawn as a natural and free fertilizer. If using store bought, fertilize in the fall, as this is the most effective time and most needed according to the seasons. Obtain a soil test from the U of M to be accurate for your soil and grass’ needs. Follow package directions.
• When spreading fertilizer near paved surfaces, plan your route to ensure fertilizer is not being applied to the pavement.
• Sweep or blow spilled fertilizer back onto the lawn.
• Keep fertilizer applications at least 15 feet away from the edges of wetlands, lakes, and streams.
• Store fertilizer in well marked containers in closed areas to avoid spills.
• Use core aeration in the fall to loosen soil, allow water into the soil, and strengthen the root mass of the lawn.

PESTICIDE AND HERBICIDES
• Always follow label directions exactly - the label is the law.
• Plan applications for warm, sunny days with at least 24 hours before the next rainfall.
• Try a combination of spot-treating and over-seeding to control weeds and reduce reliance on chemicals.
• Use quality or standing weeding tools to efficiently weed by hand. Focus on early-June and mid-July to address cool season and warm season weed types.
• Be flexible with a few dandelions and scattered weeds.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN
• Identify the desired look and use for different spaces on your lawn. If a mower and visual appeal is the only use, consider replacing it with a native planting, alternative turf, raingarden, or shoreline restoration. Plant fescues or sedges in low traffic areas with the help of watersheds and landscapers.
• Consult with a watershed organization, landscaping contractor, or BlueThumb.org for alternatives to turf grass in problem areas such as steep, shady, or wet locations. VLAWMO and other watersheds have cost-share programs to help residents and businesses in the process.
• Plant and cover up bare soil, or use rock to slow down and disperse high velocity runoff areas.
• Leave a buffer of unmowed vegetation along the edge of streams and wetlands. This vegetation serves to deter geese, who gravitate to open lawns as a means to spot potential predators. This creates high concentrations of waste which are problematic for water.

PLANTS: NATIVE AND PERENNIAL VEGETATION
The benefits of native plants and grasses:
• Adapted to local growing conditions.
• Certain types grow well in poor or frequently wet soil.
• Deep roots help prevent erosion.
• Prairie species are drought tolerant.
• Once established, they require no watering, mowing, fertilizing, or pesticides.
• Stand up in winter under the weight of snow and help keep snow off the roadways.
• Provide habitat for pollinators and birds.

Thank you for supporting responsible yard care for the health of the watershed!
Visit VLAWMO.org/residents for more information, tips, and resources.