

Lawn Care Tips



Grass clippings stuck in a storm drain.



Algae blooms in a creek caused by improper disposal of lawn care materials.

Did you know you can save money by not leaving grass clippings or fertilizer on streets, sidewalks, driveways or ditches? That's because grass clippings and excess fertilizer cause algae blooms in our waterways that reduce the amount of oxygen available for aquatic organisms. Poorly maintained lawns also increase soil erosion which disrupts the natural ecosystem by smothering organisms that live at the bottom of creeks and rivers. Fish and other animals depend on these organisms as a food source. Additionally, grass clippings can clog pipes. Cleaning all of this costs taxpayer money that we don't need to be spending! Plus, smarter lawn care can save you money by decreasing the amount of fertilizer you need to use.

Here are lawn care tips to help keep you from throwing money down the (storm) drain!

- Mow lawns to a grass blade length of 2-3 inches in the spring and fall. Raise the mower deck in the summer to keep the grass blade length longer.
- Only remove 1/3 of the height of the grass blade at any one time. Let the clippings fall and stay on the lawn. This helps build the soil and fosters healthy lawns, which need less watering. You do not need a special mower to do this.
- Have a ditch to mow? Pick a path where the mower distributes clippings on your lawn instead of in the ditch or in the street.
- Sweep grass clippings and any fertilizer or soil back onto the lawn, where it will become mulch. Have extra clippings? They can be composted or applied to shrubs and gardens.
- Test your soil before adding fertilizer. Excess fertilizer runs off when it rains. A soil test through Virginia Cooperative Extension costs \$10, only needs to be done once every three years and can save you from buying unnecessary fertilizer. For more information, visit <http://soiltest.vt.edu/fees-and-forms.html>.

Learn more about responsible lawn care at <http://ext.vt.edu/lawn-garden/urban-nutrient-management.html>.

