Promote Environmentally-friendly Landscaping

Traditional landscaping often has harmful environmental impacts. Clearing woodlands and other natural habitats for urban/suburban growth and planting vast lawns place a heavy toll on the environment. This type of landscape requires extensive use of mechanical equipment, unnecessary consumption of our limited natural resources (water and fossil fuels), frequent application of fertilizers and pesticides, and the generation of significant quantities of solid waste (yard waste). As a result, our surface and ground waters are being polluted and our landfills are filling up. Furthermore, the native plants that once naturally existed are being replaced by invasive plants, most commonly introduced through landscaping practices.

Limit Fertilizer Use

Fertilizers can contaminate both groundwater and surface water. Fertilizers contain nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen that not only promote grass growth, but also cause excessive algae growth in ponds and lakes. Ultimately, the survival of fish and other aquatic life is threatened. This is why the proper use and application of fertilizers are extremely important.

Reduce turf areas. Install woodland, meadow or other natural plantings. Where lawns are needed (such as play areas), follow Best Management Practices available from your county's cooperative extension agent.

Practice soil and water conservation. Stabilize slopes with natural plantings, mulch around plants, and install drought-tolerant species. Capture roof runoff in a rain barrel, and use this to water your plants.

Use plantings to reduce heating and cooling needs. Deciduous trees planted appropriately along the south sides of buildings can reduce air conditioning costs by up to 20 percent. In winter, they allow the sun's rays to warm buildings. Coniferous trees planted to block prevailing northwest winter winds can reduce heating costs.

Avoid use of invasive exotic species. These out-compete native plants and result in the decline of biodiversity. Examples include: Norway maples, kudzu, purple loosestrife, autumn olive, Japanese honeysuckle, multiflora rose, and barberry. If these species appear, they should be eradicated.

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References:
Delaware Nutrient Management Commission. Educational Pamphlet: Managing Nutrients for Your Turf, Grass, and Lawns. Dover, Delaware.

New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services. Factsheet: Proper Lawn Care Can Protect Waters. Concord, New Hampshire.

Helping the Environment

Starts in Your Back Yard

Proper Lawn Care

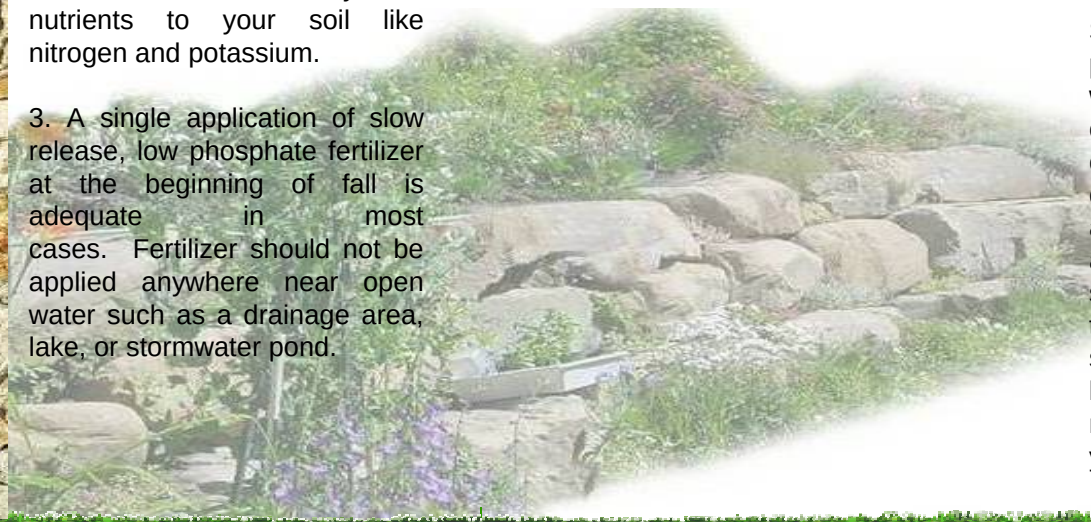
1. Test the pH of your soil. Plants are happiest and grow the best with a pH between 5 ½ and 7 ½. The University of Delaware Soil Testing Program can test your soil for a small fee. They will explain how to properly balance your soil pH.

2. Leave the grass clippings on the lawn. This is the best and most efficient way to fertilize your lawn. It will cut your mowing time by an average of 38 percent and reduce the amount of solid waste in landfills. This also naturally adds nutrients to your soil like nitrogen and potassium.

3. A single application of slow release, low phosphate fertilizer at the beginning of fall is adequate in most cases. Fertilizer should not be applied anywhere near open water such as a drainage area, lake, or stormwater pond.

4. Cut your grass from about 2 to 3 inches in height. The longer the grass, the deeper the roots. Deeper roots enable the grass to tap into a larger volume of nutrients and moisture in the ground. Also, longer grass will discourage weed growth.

5. Plant a well distributed stand of trees to shade the grass from the full sun. Seed mixes that are tolerant of lower light conditions are available. A shaded lawn also requires less watering.



Plant Native Grasses Where Possible

Native Grass Mixture	Seeding Rate (lb/Ac)	Seeding Rate (lb/1000 ft^2)	Remarks
Switchgrass or	10	0.23	Warm-season mixture
Coastal Panicgrass	10	0.23	Tolerant of low fertility soils
Big Bluestem	5	0.11	Drought tolerant
Little Bluestem	5	0.11	Poor shade tolerance
Indian Grass	5	0.1	Nitrogen fertilizer discouraged
Planting (Coastal Plains): February - October, May - mid Aug optimal **Planting (Piedmont):** March - October; May - July optimal			

Note: These grasses are native warm season grasses, and should be planted in well drained soils. They are available by request at several locations in the state of Delaware and Maryland.

How to Take a Soil Sample

Soil tests will help you develop and maintain a more productive soil by providing information about your soil's fertility. Information from a soil test will help you select the proper fertilization program to obtain optimal growth of your lawn and garden. One of the most important steps in soil testing is collecting the sample. Soil sample kits can be obtained from the University of Delaware Soil Testing Program, Department of Plant and Soil Science, at (302) 831-1392. Soil sample bags and other important information are also available at your county cooperative extension office. Each soil sample should represent only one soil condition. Although soils can be tested any time during the year, be sure to sample well before planting or spring green-up. This is particularly important in areas where it is likely that lime will be needed. Use the results of your soil test to determine how much lime and fertilizer your soil needs. Retest the soil each year until your soil fertility is well balanced.