



Water Quality Friendly Lawn Care While Sheltering At Home

Spending more time than usual at home these days due to the novel coronavirus pandemic? Thinking about working on the lawn or digging in the garden? Whether you are looking to enjoy more time outside or engage your children in a project, this season is a great time to develop some new habits that will improve your green thumb, help protect the environment, and save money. Whatever we do in our yards affects lakes, rivers, streams and bays downhill. By adopting a few simple practices, we can protect the health of water bodies we love while taking care of ourselves and the people around us by sheltering at home.

Tip 1. Take caution with spring clean up (Good for Leaf and Yard Waste Disposal)

One of the first activities drawing us outside in the spring is tidying up the accumulation of twigs, pine needles, and decaying leaves left behind during the winter. As this plant material decomposes, it releases nutrients, so there's no need to aim for immaculate, but important to let the sunlight through. The bulk of the raked-up yard waste should be put in an area where it can compost away from any drainage area or water body. NEVER, rake yard waste into a stormdrain, down a river bank, or adjacent to any water body. Excess nutrients in a water body lead to algae blooms that rob aquatic and marine animals of oxygen, obscure water clarity, and even decrease adjacent property values. Learn more about composting here:

<https://extension.unh.edu/resource/composting-home-gardener-fact-sheet>

Other temptations in the spring include fertilizing too early and mowing too short. Different formulations of fertilizer require different minimum temperatures. Hold off on applying until you are sure your soil needs it and the soil temperature is adequate. Likewise, resist the temptation to mow too low. Encourage the early season grass roots to grow deeper into the soil by keeping more of the grass blade growing above ground.

This series provides tips for growing healthy lawns and protecting water quality while we are spending more time at home. This is a perfect opportunity to adopt habits that we have put off because we didn't have as much time at home. Enjoy the season of growth while keeping yourself and others safe. Learn more tips for water quality friendly lawn care here:

https://seagrant.unh.edu/sites/default/files/media/pdfs/extension/GreenGrassClearWater/green_grass_and_clear_water_flyer_2019.pdf



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Tip 2. Water wisely

Our lawns and gardens need about one inch of water per week, which is about the annual average amount of rainfall in northern New England¹. During dry spells, especially later in the summer, it may be necessary to water or irrigate to reach that amount. On the other hand, overwatering wastes water and can cause nutrients needed by plants to run off the property or leach deep into the soil out of reach of plant roots. Place a rain gauge or empty bean or tuna can out in the yard and check it weekly to see if the rain has reached a one-inch mark. Only water or irrigate when the rainfall drops below that one-inch weekly average. Learn more about watering



wisely here: <https://extension.unh.edu/blog/water-conservation-fundamentals-gardening-and-landscaping>

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¹ NOAA National Climatic Data Center