

# A perfectly lovely lawn: chemical free & safe to play on!



Mow higher, mow often, and leave the clippings.

- Set mowing heights up to about 2 1/2 inches for most lawns (1 1/2 inches on bentgrass lawns) to develop deeper roots and crowd out weeds.
- Mow when the grass gets 50% taller than the desired height. Mow regularly, even on summer-dormant lawns, to keep weeds from setting seed.
- Leave the clippings on the lawn: "Grasscycling" provides free fertilizer, helps lawns grow greener and denser, and doesn't cause thatch buildup. (Thatch is last year's woody roots and stems, not clippings.) Mow when the grass is dry and keep mower blades sharp for best results.
- When it's time to buy a new mower, consider a "mulching" mower. They chop clippings finely and blow them down into the lawn so they disappear.



Fertilize lightly in the fall with a "natural-organic" or "slow-release" fertilizer.

- Natural fertilizers release nutrients slowly through the year, won't leach away, and support the variety of soil organisms that improve fertility and combat diseases.
- Healthy lawns are a lighter "meadow" green color. Dark blackish-green lawns are over-fertilized and unhealthy: more prone to disease and thatch buildup and drought damage.
- Fertilize in the fall to build the grass plant's nutrient reserves. Never fertilize in early spring because that makes grass grow too fast and robs its reserves. Late

April, early May and early fall are O.K. to fertilize too, but late fall is the single best time. Remember, grasscycling returns valuable nutrients to the soil every time you mow! Add lime in the fall or spring, if a soil test shows calcium deficiency or acid soil.

Water deeply but infrequently.

- Grasses do best when the whole root zone is wetted and then dries out between waterings. This encourages roots to grow longer and deeper. Avoid frequent shallow watering that causes poor root development. Over-watering (constantly wet soil) also promotes lawn disease.
- Aerate (or de-thatch) if water won't penetrate the surface because of soil compaction, steep slopes or thatch buildup. Water about one inch per week in mid-summer. Water slowly, or start and stop, so the water penetrates rather than puddling and running off. Don't water in the heat of the day - that promotes disease and wastes water.
- Consider letting the lawn go brown and dormant in the summer. Watering deeply (but slowly, so it penetrates) once each rainless month will help dormant lawns to recover better in the fall. Avoid heavy traffic that can damage dormant lawns, or water just the high-use areas to prevent damage.

MORE INFO  ON BACK



**King County**

Department of  
Natural Resources and Parks  
Solid Waste Division

## Five Steps to: Natural Yard Care





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 **King County**  
Department of  
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**Solid Waste Division**  
206-296-4466  
711 (TTY)

Improve old lawns with aeration, overseeding, and top dressing with compost.

- Aerate in spring or fall. Use a rented power-aerator for best results. Or insert a garden fork 6" deep every four inches and lever back to loosen the soil.
- Overseed, after raking or aerating to expose soil, with a rye/fescue mix designed for Pacific Northwest conditions – talk to a knowledgeable nursery-person or call WSU Cooperative Extension at 206-296-3440, for seed recommendations.
- Top dress with fine compost (screened to 3/8-inch) one-quarter inch deep, raked out so the grass stands up through it.
- May or mid-September are the best times for aerating, over-seeding, and top dressing.
- Thatch is the thick, matted area of roots, just below the surface. This area should be loose and open. If it is solid and matted, with little flexibility, you have thatch.

- De-thatch in early spring if accumulations are over 1/2-inch thick. Or, decompose thatch slowly by aerating and top dressing. Reduce fertilizer levels and over-watering, to avoid future thatch buildup.

Avoid using pesticides, quick-release fertilizers, and weed and feed.

- These products can damage soil and lawn health, and pollute our waterways. Pesticides and weed and feed can also harm people, pets, and wildlife.
- Remove weeds by hand in spring and fall (pincer-type weed pullers work great in moist soil and can be used standing up), or spot-spray problem weeds (read carefully and follow herbicide label warnings).
- Crowd out weeds by growing a dense

lawn. Mow higher, leave the clippings, fertilize properly, and improve thin areas with aeration, overseeding and top dressing.

Consider alternatives to grass for steep slopes, shady areas, or near streams and lakes.

- Grass grows best in well-drained soil on level or gently sloping areas, in full sun.
- Call WSU Cooperative Extension at 206-296-3440, for information on alternative plants that do well on shady, steep or wet sites.
- Leave a natural vegetation buffer along streams to filter pollutants and protect fish and wildlife. Avoid use of herbicides near streams, ditches, wetlands, and shorelines.



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For printable documents and more information on Natural Yard Care and other topics, please visit:  
[www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/naturallyardcare/documents.asp](http://www.metrokc.gov/dnrp/swd/naturallyardcare/documents.asp)

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