

## Healthy Lawns, Healthy Waters

It's nearly time to put away the snow shovels and take your lawn mowers out of storage. It may not be obvious, but lawn care practices can affect our rivers and lakes. Whenever it rains, fertilizer, pesticides and grass clippings that are left on sidewalks and driveways are washed into streets, down stormdrains and into local waters. While fertilizers help keep grass green and growing, they also "fertilize" our water resources—making them green with algae.

As you prepare for spring lawn care, here are three ways to nurture your lawn and our lakes and rivers:

- **Cut your grass to 3" (or higher).** Most turf is healthiest when kept at a height of 3". Mowing high helps the grass grow healthier, longer roots so it resists disease and requires less fertilizer and water.
- **Leave grass clippings on your lawn.** Grass clippings contain nitrogen, an important nutrient for plants. Leaving clippings on your lawn adds nitrogen back to the soil. The mowed clippings are equal to about one fertilizer application per year, reducing your fertilizer costs. Grass clippings should always be swept off of hard surfaces to prevent them from washing down stormdrains to the Mississippi River and local lakes.
- **Know what your soil needs.** The best time to fertilize is in the fall. To prepare, do a soil test to determine what nutrients your lawn really needs. Because of the effects on water quality, the use of phosphorus fertilizer on residential lawns is banned in Minnesota unless a soil test shows a need or a new lawn is being established. To learn how to get your soil tested, visit <http://soiltest.cfans.umn.edu>.

If you hire a lawn service, choose a contractor who is state-certified in Summer Turf Care Best Practices. If your favorite lawn service is not certified, suggest it! A link to a list of certified contractors and upcoming workshops may be found at [www.mwmo.org/certifiedcontractors.html](http://www.mwmo.org/certifiedcontractors.html).

-This article was brought to you by the Mississippi Watershed Management Organization