



Town of Rowley Water Department A Healthy Garden and Lawn Makes for a Healthy Watershed

No matter where you live, you are in a watershed. Within that watershed, rain and snow falling on homes, lawns, and driveways eventually finds its way to the lowest point – in a river, lake, pond, stream or ocean. Often, without realizing it, homeowners contribute runoff pollutants to surface waters including lawn chemicals, fertilizers, silt and sand. However, with a few minor changes to your lawn care routine, you can begin playing an active role in improving water quality in your watershed, while saving yourself both time and money.

Do you need all that lawn? Reducing the size of your lawn will not only save you time and money from mowing, watering and fertilizing, but it will also save your watershed from pollutants in fertilizers, herbicides and other backyard runoffs. Plant groundcovers, trees, flowers, and shrubs to help water infiltrate into the ground and prevent soil erosion instead of running off a compacted lawn. Creating attractive wildlife habitat can be an added benefit.

How healthy is your soil? Test your soil to know what it actually needs before you apply fertilizer or lime. If you must fertilize, select a slow release fertilizer or organic fertilizer to avoid excess nutrients running into your water. Extra nutrients in waterbodies increase aquatic plant growth, and their eventual decay depletes oxygen needed by fish and other aquatic creatures. Maintain a fertilizer-free buffer around wetlands and surface water. It is best not to apply fertilizer within twenty-five feet of these sensitive areas.

What types of grasses are growing in your lawn? Where you need to have a lawn, a mixture of grasses (e.g., fine and tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, and Kentucky bluegrass), clover, and legumes is the ideal combination. The mix of the different species requires less nitrogen fertilizer, is more resistant to diseases and pests, and provides a more hospitable environment for beneficial insects.

What types of plantings do you have? Consider planting natural, native plant species instead of non-native plants (plants that were introduced for agricultural purposes or by accident). Native plants generally require much less water, herbicides, fertilizers, or trimming.

Do you know your bugs? Identify your particular pest problem and choose the best method or combination of ways to deal with it. Use beneficial nematodes (microscopic predators for specific insects) or milky spore (insect specific diseases) and plant insect repelling borders marigolds, chives, onions, garlic, or basil. Also, it is a good idea to rotate crops to keep insects from settling in.

Do you compost? Professional landscapers and gardeners suggest adding organic material to your soil by mulching your plantings and top dressing your lawns with compost. Compost will reduce the need for fertilizers and water by supplying nutrients and helping the soil retain moisture.