



Lawn to Lake Collaborative Encourages Climate-Smart, Lake-Friendly Lawn Practices

October 15, 2024 - Climate change is shifting precipitation patterns in the Lake Champlain Basin. For a second summer in a row, communities in the Basin experienced the impacts of flooding and reduced water quality in Lake Champlain and its tributary rivers and streams.

Even when heavy precipitation does not result in flooding, intense rainstorms can damage infrastructure, erode streambanks, and carry pollution into our waterways. Stormwater runoff—water that flows across the land’s surface instead of soaking into the ground after rain or snowmelt—is one of the significant climate challenges we face in our region.

Lawns make up a large portion of the developed area in the Lake Champlain Basin and simple changes to mowing and fertilizing practices can reduce stormwater runoff and pollution. Although lawn maintenance tends to wind down this season, fall is an important time to consider practices that reduce water quality impacts and can improve the health of your lawn and soil for next summer and beyond.

Raise the Blade

The Basin’s “Raise the Blade” campaign encourages people to adopt three simple lawn care practices that can measurably increase soil health and water infiltration:

1. Cut grass to three inches,
2. Leave grass clippings to decompose on the lawn, and
3. Trim only a third of the length of the grass blades each time you mow.

Together, these practices help grow healthy grass roots and lawns and allow soil to absorb more stormwater.

Don’t P on Your Lawn

The “Don’t P on Your Lawn” campaign encourages people to use only phosphorus-free fertilizers, take a soil test, and choose the right fertilizer for your lawn’s needs.

Phosphorus (P) is the most problematic nutrient in Lake Champlain and is found in many lawn fertilizers. When it rains, P from lawn fertilizer (as well as other sources) gets washed off the landscape and into waterways. Once in Lake Champlain, P can stimulate the growth of cyanobacteria, sometimes resulting in blooms on warm and calm days.

Laws that took effect in Vermont and New York in 2012 prohibit the use of phosphorus fertilizers [except under certain conditions](#). Most lawns in the Northeast have enough phosphorus, so fertilizers free from P will likely work for your lawn. You can learn about your lawn's specific nutrient content through a soil test. To determine whether a fertilizer contains phosphorus, look at the N-P-K ratio on the bag. A zero for the middle number indicates that the fertilizer is phosphorus-free.

Lawn Care in the Fall

Consider fertilizing only once per year, ideally in the fall. This will help your grass to grow strong roots and allow the grass to store nutrients it can use next year.

As an alternative to fertilizing your lawn with commercial fertilizers you can spread about a quarter inch of compost on your lawn. Putting compost on your lawn will help make your soil healthier. Compost also hosts beneficial microorganisms that help keep your soil healthy.

Get Involved & Win a Free Electric Lawnmower

There are many ways to get involved in reducing stormwater runoff, preventing phosphorus pollution, and increasing climate resilience in the Lake Champlain Basin. Adopting Raise the Blade and Don't P On Your Lawn practices on your own lawn is a great place to start. Many more healthy lawn tips can be found at [Lawn to Lake](#).

[Enter a drawing for a chance to win a free electric mulching mower](#). The drawing will be held on October 18th, 2024 in celebration of the 52nd anniversary of the signing of the Clean Water Act.

For more ways to get involved, visit <https://lawntolake.org>.