

Lake Wise Info Sheet



Shoreland Best Management Practices for Lake-friendly Living

Benefits

- Water Quality
- Wildlife Habitat
- Prevents Erosion
- Slow, Spread, Sink Stormwater
- Visual Appeal
- Low Cost
- Low Maintenance
- Protection & Resiliency

Related Info Sheets:

Lakeshore Buffers
Managing Invasive Plants
Ticks & Shorelands
Planning Pathways



See NYS DEC for more information

LAKE-FRIENDLY YARD MAINTENANCE

Prevent pollution & benefit biodiversity



Description

Simple yard and garden maintenance practices that can save time, effort, and money, and help keep lake waters safe for people, pets, and wildlife.

Applicability

For all homeowners, managers, and landscapers that maintain lakeshore properties to reduce or eliminate stormwater runoff and pollutants that enter the lake from lawns, gardens, driveways, pets, and household practices.



Mow less, low-mow, and no-mow

Mowing your lawn less frequently and at a higher blade height lessens the amount of fuel and maintenance needed and increases capacity to slow down and filter stormwater runoff. Allow grass to grow 4 inches or higher and when you mow, raise your blades to 3 inches, allowing the grass to grow longer roots that aerate the soil, reverse compaction, and increase nutrient and water holding capacity. Leave the grass clippings on the lawn to provide a natural fertilizer for grass growth. See **Raise the Blade**.

Convert areas of lawn along the lakeshore or seldom used to meadows or “low-mow” areas that are only mown once every 1 to 3 years to maintain a meadow planting. Mow as late in the fall as possible to protect native bees, birds, and other nesting wildlife. Leave the plant cuttings in place for organic matter and moisture retention. You can seed in native wildflowers or let them return naturally over the years. You can allow volunteer native woody shrubs and trees to grow by simply stopping mowing and turning it into a “no-mow zone” or a selectively mown area to allow for natural succession of native plant communities.

These low-mow and no-mow areas are very effective filters for stormwater runoff and can help protect sensitive areas such as lakeshores, streams, wetlands, and woodland areas from runoff and erosion. They can also be established along ditches, roads, driveways, and other areas to help intercept and filter stormwater runoff close to the source.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



VERMONT

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT DIVISION



LAKE-FRIENDLY YARD MAINTENANCE

Prevent pollution & benefit biodiversity

VTDEC Lake Wise Program



Increase gardens

Reduce lawn area by planting native gardens that provide soil cover with planted groundcovers or mulch. Lawns can also be seeded with low-growing sedges, fescues, clovers, violets, and other groundcovers that add plant diversity and provide flowers for pollinators and for you to enjoy. Selecting native plants lessens the need for watering and fertilizers since they are typically more drought tolerant and do not need added nutrients.

Lawn and garden watering

Overwatering can cause soils, yard wastes, and nutrients from fertilizers to wash over the landscape and into the lake, polluting waters with sediment, excessive nutrients, and chemicals. Overhead sprinklers and watering too often can increase the pollutants entering the lake.

Conserve water by using drip irrigation, soaker hoses, or micro-spray systems. Avoid watering onto paved surfaces or areas that drain into storm drains or directly into the lake. Make sure there is a vegetated buffer between all irrigated areas and the lake (see **Lakeshore Buffers**).

Materials

- ✿ Raise mower blade to 3 inches
- ✿ Drip irrigation, soaker hoses, micro-spray systems
- ✿ Native plants
- ✿ No phosphorus - "0" P - fertilizer
- ✿ Low-phosphorus compost – composted leaf litter/yard waste
- ✿ Natural, biodegradable products
- ✿ Natural pest management
- ✿ Proper disposal of hazardous waste

Yard scraps

Leaves, grass clippings, and tree trimmings can clog catchbasins and storm drains, increasing the risk of flooding. Yard scraps that enter rivers and lakes absorb oxygen as they decompose, straining or killing aquatic life. Do not blow or rake leaves into the storm drain, lake, or street (unless there is an active designated municipal leaf pickup scheduled). **Do not dump yard waste into surface waters.**

Remove leaves, twigs, and other yard scraps from gutters, driveways, and storm drains; compost or place on gardens as a natural mulch, adding organic material. Grass clippings can be left on lawns as a natural fertilizer.

If removing, use approved containers for curb side pickup (where offered) or take it to a waste or compost facility.

Yard waste and clean wood are discouraged from the landfill, except for invasive species. Invasive species can be bagged and disposed of.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation





LAKE-FRIENDLY YARD MAINTENANCE

Prevent pollution & benefit biodiversity



Composting Association of Vermont

Use low-P compost instead of chemical fertilizers.



Lake Champlain international

Pesticides and herbicides can be very harmful to fish.

Fertilizer application

Reduce or eliminate the application of fertilizers to lawns and landscaped areas, which can contaminate ground and surface water and harm beneficial insects. Most New York lawns do not need fertilizer at all. Test your soil before applying fertilizer to determine the appropriate type and quantity to use on lawns and gardens with **Cornell's Soil Health Lab basic nutrient test**.

Phosphorus is an important nutrient for plant growth, but it is also a leading cause of poor water quality in Vermont lakes. **There is a law in New York and Vermont that prohibits the application of phosphorus (and nitrogen) onto lawns, unless it is a new lawn or soil tests indicate a phosphorus deficiency.**

Compost is a good alternative to other fertilizers because it adds organic matter, breaks down over time, and the nutrients are less water soluble. However, only low-phosphorus compost (e.g., leaf litter or yard waste-based) should be used near lakes and waterways, not phosphorus-rich food scrap or manure-based composts.

Pest management

Instead of using pesticides, try using pest management practices that utilize physical controls (e.g., barriers or traps), biological controls (e.g., green lacewings that eat aphids), and bacterial insecticides (e.g., *Bacillus thuringiensis* that kill mosquitoes). Chemical control should be considered a last resort.

The following are the least harmful: dehydrating dusts (e.g., silica gel or diatomaceous earth), insecticidal soaps, boric acid powder, horticultural oils, and pyrethrin-based insecticides.

If you must use a pesticide, use one that is specifically designed to control your pest and use only as directed. The insect should be listed on the label. Approximately 90% of the insects on your lawn and garden are beneficial so use extreme care if using a pesticide.

Herbicides

Herbicides should only be used on invasive plant species as a last resort. See **Managing Invasive Plants** and adkinvasives.com.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



Lake Wise Info Sheet



LAKE-FRIENDLY YARD MAINTENANCE

Prevent pollution & benefit biodiversity

Rethink Runoff



Do not let leaves, lawn clippings, oil, fertilizers, pet waste, or chemicals drain into lakes and rivers!

Proper storage and disposal of household hazardous waste

It is important to store and dispose of hazardous waste in the proper manner. Fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemicals should be stored in a covered area to prevent contaminating runoff.

Household hazardous waste such as pesticides, cleaners, paints, and motor oil can pollute and poison lakes and waterways and is illegal to dump into the storm drain, street, gutter, or ditch. Follow instructions on the container for proper disposal and check your local transfer station or waste management district for recycling and waste disposal guidance. See **NYS DEC Household Hazardous Waste** for more information.

Check your car, boat, motorcycle, and other machinery and equipment for leaks and spills. Make repairs as soon as possible. Clean up spilled fluids with an absorbent material like kitty litter or sand and dispose of it properly. Many auto supply stores and gas stations accept used oil.

World Famous Sign Co.



Pet waste

Pet waste left on the ground can be washed away by runoff, contributing bacteria, parasites, and viruses to downstream water bodies. Pet waste can be the cause of significant pollution that presents health risks to adults, children, and other pets. To properly dispose of animal waste, use newspaper, bags, or pooper scoopers to pick up waste and place in the trash. Never discard pet waste in a storm drain or in the lake.

Car wash

Wash your car at a commercial car wash when possible rather than in your driveway. If you do wash your car at home, use biodegradable products that break down more easily and are less toxic to plants and fish. Use soap sparingly. Wash your car on a grassy area to help soak in water and filter soaps and other chemicals.

More information

- 💧 Lake Champlain Basin Program Lawn to Lake
- 💧 NY Application of phosphorus fertilizer law
- 💧 NY Pesticide Applicator Certification
- 💧 NYS DEC Household Hazardous Waste
- 💧 NYS DEC Nuisance & Invasive Species



Department of
Environmental
Conservation

