

These simple landscaping tips can help you to maintain a beautiful lawn while protecting water quality in local lakes and streams. The following recommendations are designed to protect your lawn during the winter months and will give it a head start for next spring, while reducing nutrients and other pollution from entering nearby waterbodies.



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Central New York Regional Planning & Development Board  
126 North Salina St., 100 Clinton Square, Suite 200, Syracuse, NY 13202  
phone: (315) 422-8276 fax: (315) 422-9051 mail@cnyrpd.org www.cnyrpd.org

# Autumn Lawn Care Guide

*Six easy tips on how  
to prepare your lawn  
for winter while  
protecting local lakes  
and streams*



# Autumn Lawn Care Guide for Surface and Groundwater Protection

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## ***Fertilize with Care.***

Test your soil before applying fertilizer and avoid using fertilizers containing phosphorus. Phosphorus is an essential nutrient for plant growth but too much can be harmful to lakes and streams because it promotes the growth of algae and aquatic plants. Excessive plant growth impacts boating and fishing and when the plants die, the decomposition process reduces the amount of oxygen available to fish and other aquatic life.

Many soils in this region have naturally high levels of phosphorus. You can save time and money by purchasing no-phosphorus fertilizer for your lawn and by carefully following the application rates found on the bag. If soil nitrogen levels are low, apply a slow release fertilizer to allow time for gradual soil infiltration. Fall fertilization can help the turf develop a vigorous root system, survive cold temperatures and winter stress, and will help it to bounce back quickly in the spring.



## ***Check the Weather Forecast.***

Never apply fertilizer before a rainstorm, as heavy rainfall can cause fertilizer to flow into nearby lakes and streams. Sweep up any spillage from your patio or driveway to prevent it from flowing offsite and avoid fertilizing lawns located near waterways, drainage swales, and storm drains.

## ***Increase the Cutting Height.***

Grass roots continue to grow throughout the fall, so continue mowing but increase the cutting height to 2 to 3 inches to help maintain healthy root growth. Leave the clippings on the lawn to recycle the nutrients back into the soil, or place them in a bag or compost pile. Never put the clippings in nearby ditches, streets, storm drains, or streams.

## ***Rake the Leaves and Aerate the Lawn.***

Remove the leaves in the fall in order to aerate the soil and provide sunlight to the grass. Core aeration is a process of mechanically removing plugs of soil and thatch from the lawn. Leaf raking and soil aeration in the fall will result in healthier plants that will get off to a faster growing season the following spring. Check your municipal lawn waste collection schedule and place leaves, lawn clippings, and other garden waste by the road (never in the storm drain) for collection.

## ***Maintain the Correct Soil pH.***

Apply lime and adjust the pH to between 6.5 and 7.2 in order to improve the efficiency of nutrient absorption. This simple measure will save you time and money by reducing the frequency and amount of fertilization.

## ***Carefully Store Your Equipment.***

Be sure to store lawn care equipment and supplies (including pesticides, fertilizers, oil, and gasoline) in a dry location during the winter months. When the lawn mowing season is over, empty the gas and oil tanks by allowing the lawnmower run until its gas tank is empty or carefully drain it with a catch bin. *Never* drain gas or oil directly on the lawn, into storm drains, or catch basins where it can pollute surface and ground water. Leave the oil and gas tank empty during the winter for easier start-up and better performance next spring.

