

Lawn Care & Landscaping Guide



ProjectClarity
Restoring the Macatawa Watershed

Project Clarity

Project Clarity, a division of the ODC Network, collaborates with the community to enhance water quality in Lake Macatawa and nearby streams. Sustainable lawn care practices help protect local water quality. Follow this guide's sustainable practices or contact local Lawn Care & Landscaping Partners for assistance.



To be a Project Clarity Partner, a lawn care or landscaping company agrees to the following:

- Observe the Michigan Fertilizer Act related to the use of fertilizers and best practices that must be used when applying fertilizers.
- Prior to applying fertilizer, measure the size of the lawn to ensure the correct amount of fertilizer is applied.
- Cut grass no shorter than three inches to promote a healthier lawn that needs less water and fertilizer.
- Sweep or blow all grass clippings and fertilizer off impervious surfaces back into lawns to prevent runoff to storm drains. Make a good faith effort to keep grass clippings from directly entering surface water bodies such as drains, streams and lakes.
- Mulch clipping if possible, but if grass clippings are taken off site, store and compost properly so materials are not washed away in stormwater runoff.
- Make customers aware of best management practices for water quality and water conservation (i.e. native plant use, waterfront landscaping, rain barrels, irrigation timers/sensors, etc.).
- Make an effort to be aware of non-native invasive plant species, monitor for them and make clients aware when they are present on their property.

Proper Mowing

Lawn mowing is one of the most important chores in regular lawn maintenance. Improper mowing can harm water quality and even the grass itself! Follow these mowing tips to increase the health of your lawn, save time and money, and protect your watershed.

- Mow when the grass reaches no more than 4.5" tall and mow to 3". Taller blades promote a healthier lawn, and healthy lawns require less maintenance.
- If possible, use a mulch mower to return clippings to your lawn. This natural fertilizer will reduce the need for chemical fertilizer.

Note: Do not leave clippings on paved surfaces; sweep or blow them back into the lawn. Grass clippings left on sidewalks and roads can be washed away by rain into lakes and streams. Once in the water, they breakdown into nutrients that can lead to algal blooms and harm the aquatic ecosystem.



Did you know...

Healthy lawns provide many benefits including removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and producing oxygen. Lawns are also cooler than the surrounding paved surfaces, providing relief to bare feet in the hot summer months. Healthy lawns protect the soil from erosion and will allow more rain water to infiltrate compared to unhealthy lawns. Finally, healthy lawns improve curb appeal, which can increase the value of your home.

Proper Fertilization



First, test your soil so you know what your lawn needs. Plants will not use excess fertilizer, so more is not better. If you choose to apply in the spring, wait until the ground thaws. The best time to fertilize in Michigan is in the fall. If you use commercial fertilizer, choose one without phosphorus and never apply near open water.



Some of the easiest fertilizer, applicable for nearly all lawn owners, is leaving some of your grass clippings. As they break down, they release nutrients into the soil. This natural process also supports the microbiology in the soil. Beneficial soil microorganisms, including bacteria, fungi and nematodes, support plants by helping to drive nutrient recycling in the soil. A healthy soil biology can reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers.

Proper Watering

Most plants, lawns included, only need about 1" of water, plus the amount that evaporates, applied in small amounts throughout the week. Light, frequent watering supports a healthier lawn. Water 15-20 minutes a day between noon and 4pm. Monitor grass and soil moisture and adjust as needed. Do not overwater as this can damage your lawn and harm local waterways through increased runoff.



Just like any other plant, grass goes through cycles during the growing season. During especially hot months, brown tips may be visible. This is normal and does not indicate a need for increased watering. In fact, overwatering can lead to grass death, which produces even more brown color! Err on the side of caution and use less, which saves time and money, as well as our lakes and streams!



Lawn Alternatives

Traditional lawn maintenance requires regular mowing, fertilizing and watering. These activities, if not done properly, can lead to water pollution and other concerns. Replacing traditional turf lawns with lawn alternatives, like clover, is a great way to make your lawn and landscape more sustainable.

Clover lawns (bottom left) are more sustainable than traditional turf because they require less water and other inputs. Clover has longer roots compared to turf that are able to seek water deeper in the soil. In the summer, an average grass lawn uses over 125 gallons of water each time it is watered. Alternative lawns rarely need to be watered. Another benefit of clover is that it promotes healthy pollinator populations. Flowering plants are one of the most important food sources for urban pollinators, so replacing a grass lawn with a clover lawn can help pollinators thrive.

Other types of lawn alternatives include sedges (bottom center) and liriopse which are more grass like, and groundcovers like Ajuga and creeping thyme (bottom right). These alternatives add color and texture while requiring less maintenance and supporting pollinators.

You can also reduce your lawn by adding other elements like vegetable gardens or native plant gardens, expanding existing landscape beds, or planting trees and shrubs. All of these can help reduce the amount of maintenance you have to do as well as your lawn's impact on the environment.



Native Plants

Like lawn alternatives, native plants are a great way to make your lawn or landscape more sustainable. Landscaping with native plants attracts pollinators to your yard, protects water quality, and improves soil structure. Native plants can also decrease the amount of regular yard work required while improving the aesthetic of your yard!



Manage Stormwater

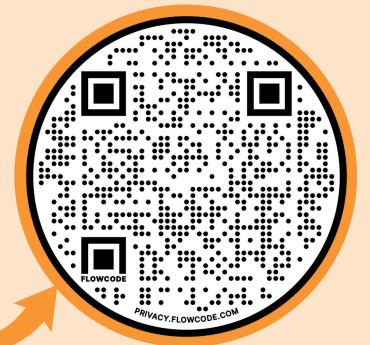
In addition to alternative plants in your lawn and landscape, there are many things you can do to promote sustainability in your yard. Managing stormwater helps decrease flooding, water pollution, and erosion.



Ways to manage stormwater include capturing rain water in rain barrels, installing rain gardens, replacing turf grass with native plants, and planting trees. Collectively, we refer to these practices as rainscaping.



The ODC Network offers the Macatawa Rainscaping program to all Macatawa Watershed residents. This program starts with a free site assessment followed by recommendations from a trained volunteer or professional about how to better manage stormwater on your property. Scan the QR code to learn more and sign up for your free site assessment.



SCAN ME 



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