



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

Six Steps to Natural Lawn Care

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Like neighbors, environmental concerns can meet on the lawn. The same pesticides most commonly sold for lawn care are those most frequently found in our streams. Excess nutrients from fertilizers can cause algae blooms in lakes and high nitrates in ground water. Attractive lawns can be grown without these problems. Follow these six steps to natural lawn care for a healthy, lovely lawn that also helps protect our environment. Landscapers Howard Stenn and Wayne Kennedy will share more tips at a free lawn care workshop on **Tuesday, March 23 from 7-9 pm** at the Lacey Community Center.

1. **Cut it high, let it lie.** Cut the grass about two inches high for most grass species or one inch for bentgrass. Taller grass has deeper roots, is more drought resistant, and helps prevent weeds from sprouting. Letting the grass clippings stay on the lawn, or mulch mowing, provides a regular dose of grass fertilizer all growing season. In fact, mulch mowing can cut your need for fertilizer by a third.
2. **Fertilize with slow-release fertilizer.** Nutrients stick around rather than wash away in a slow-release fertilizer. Most organic fertilizers are slow-release. Check the fine print on the label for the percent of water-insoluble nitrogen. In slow-release fertilizer this number should be at least half the total nitrogen listed on the label. Always follow application directions on the label.
3. **Water deeply, but infrequently.** Grass does better when the whole root zone gets moistened and the top dries out between watering. This encourages deeper roots, which in turn make the grass stronger. One inch of water a week, including rain, is all grass needs to stay green. Or join the growing number of people who allow their lawns to go dormant in the summer. Water once a month to help golden summer lawns turn green again in the fall.
4. **Improve poor lawns with aeration, over-seeding, and top-dressing with compost.** Aerating allows air and water to move into the soil. The next step is to over-seed with a northwest blend of rye and fescue grass seeds. Finally top-dress by raking in a quarter-inch of fine compost to cover the seed and improve the soil. Be sure existing grass pokes through the compost.
5. **Avoid fertilizers mixed with weed or insect control.** The weed and bug killers can end up in our streams, our ground water, Puget Sound, and in our homes carried in on shoes and paws. The most effective way to crowd out weeds and reduce pest damage is through proper fertilization, watering, and mowing.

6. **Plant right for the site.** Grass grows best on level, well-drained soil in full sun or part shade. If your yard is very shady, close to a stream or lake, or on a steep hill, consider other landscaping. Native plants suited for your site are easy to care for and can help attract birds and other wildlife. See www.greatplantpicks.org for photos and descriptions of plants that thrive in our northwest climate.

To register for the workshop or request a free Common Sense Guide to Natural Lawn Care, e-mail veninj@co.thurston.wa.us or call 360-867-2582.

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