

# Protecting Area Waterways Starts in Your Own Yard



Spring always arrives, even if it sometimes takes a long route. But before we revel in the newfound warmth and breathe in the blossoms, there's a nasty chore to be done: cleaning up the post-winter crud in the yard.

As you do so this year, remember that tidying up your yard now, if done properly, can also help keep local waterways clean.

Whatever washes off your yard, driveway, sidewalk and street and into a storm sewer will go directly to lakes and rivers. It's very important that people keep things such as grass clippings, pet waste, fertilizer, and tree leaves and seeds out of the runoff from their home. All these things contain phosphorus, which turns lakes and rivers green with algae and reduces the water quality. If everyone does just their own small part, the collective results really can help improve water quality.

Along with reducing the amount of phosphorus in your yard runoff, it's also important to reduce the volume of the runoff to further protect lakes and rivers. There are a number of things people can do to deal with the water flowing off their roofs and paved surfaces, so that more of it infiltrates into the soil and less goes to the storm sewer.

Here are some tips for homeowners:

## Spring cleaning for your yard

- Clean up pet waste and trash.
- Sweep up sand to reuse next winter.
- Rake up leaves and twigs and put in your compost pile or bag them for



disposal with your other yard trimmings.

- Keep storm drains clear, and don't rake debris from the lawn to the street.
- Direct water from your downspouts away from the house and paved surfaces, and onto the lawn.
- Don't apply lawn care products to frozen ground — wait until the grass starts growing.

## Maintaining your lawn — and water quality, too

- If you fertilize your lawn, use zero-phosphorus fertilizer. And remember, nitrogen, not phosphorus, is what greens up grass.
- Sweep up and reuse any lawn care products that fall on streets, sidewalks and driveways.
- Always read and follow label directions when using lawn care products and disposing of their containers. Use compost and manure appropriately, too, as they also contain phosphorus.
- Keep leaves, seeds and grass clippings from washing off hard surfaces and into storm drains. Compost them in your yard, bag for collection, or take to a community compost site.
- Keep soil from washing down storm drains, as it also contains phosphorus. Reseed or mulch bare spots on your lawn, and avoid placing garden beds next to driveways or street curbs where soil can easily escape.

**Remember if you take care of the environment it will take care of you!**

Source:  
<http://www.crwc.org/programs/education/stormwatertips/col.html>