

# Water-Friendly Lawn Care

In Virginia Beach, we are learning how to have a beautiful yard and protect the River. It is easier than you think! By following these simple rules you can have a beautiful, healthy lawn and help us clean up the River. Thank you for helping to make Virginia Beach the cleanest and greenest city on the East Coast.



**Excess fertilizer, pesticides (herbicides/insecticides/fungicides) and sediments are a major source of pollution in our waterways.**

A properly managed lawn will reduce erosion and sedimentation of the Lynnhaven and ultimately requires less fertilizer and pesticide than a poorly cared for lawn. Where you grow turf, select the right turf species, mow at the correct height, calibrate spreaders and make prudent decisions on irrigation, fertilizer and pesticide applications. Follow these simple guidelines:

## REDUCE YOUR LAWN AREA

Minimize the use of turf in your landscape design by converting part of your lawn to planted beds and riparian buffers. Select plants that do not require significant fertilizers and pesticides.

## USE THE CORRECT TURFGRASS SPECIES

In full sun, use bermudagrass for your lawn; in light shade, tall fescue, St. Augustinegrass or zoysiagrass. Adjust your care to the turfgrass species you are growing.

## MOW AT THE CORRECT HEIGHT

Mowing turf too low makes it susceptible to weed, insect and disease invasion. Bermudagrass will perform best at a height of 2" to 2½"; tall fescue, St. Augustinegrass and zoysiagrass at 3" to 4".

## IRRIGATE ONLY AS NEEDED

Unneeded irrigation promotes disease, weed infestations, wastes power and depletes valuable ground water. Install a rain sensor on your automatic sprinkler system. Check the soil moisture level; not all brown turf is drought stricken. Early morning irrigation minimizes water loss and diseases. Water deeply and infrequently.



# If you fertilize,

**have your soil tested for nutrient availability before applying fertilizers.**

- Pick up soil sampling kits from local libraries, the Virginia Cooperative Extension office at 2449 Princess Anne Road, Building #14, Virginia Beach or the Lynnhaven River NOW office. Mail the completed information form with the sample box and fee (\$10, for basic testing) to the address on the form. Your test results will be mailed to you.
- Follow your soil test recommendations for soil amendments. Fertilizers are described by three numbers, such as 12-4-8 or 46-0-0. These three numbers indicate, respectively, the percent by weight of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) in the fertilizer. The test also indicates the acidity (pH) of your soil and whether lime is needed.
- Calibrate your spreader annually and sweep any fertilizer off paved areas before it is washed away by rain or irrigation. Measure your turf area to ensure you are using the proper amounts of fertilizer. See the Virginia Cooperative Extension website, listed below, for details on spreader calibration.
- Fertilize with 1 to 1.5 lbs N/1000 ft<sup>2</sup>/year. Use slow release forms of nitrogen. For tall fescue, apply a maximum of one pound of N/1000 ft<sup>2</sup> in the fall and 1/2 lb or less in late spring. For bermudagrass, St. Augustinegrass and zoysiagrass, apply 1 to 1½ lbs N/1000 ft<sup>2</sup>/year from April - September.
- Do not apply phosphorus (P) unless your soil results indicate that it is needed. Local soils often contain sufficient phosphorus and it is a major waterway pollutant.
- Apply potassium (K) at 1.5 to 3 lbs/1000 ft<sup>2</sup>/year, if indicated on soil test.

Manage weeds, insects and diseases; don't allow pests to create bare soil which leads to erosion and sedimentation of our waterways. Be careful to identify pests and consider alternative control measures before applying any pesticides.

Maintain sharp mower blades and never remove more than 25% of turf with any one mowing. Recycle grass clippings by leaving mulched cuttings on your lawn.

A properly managed lawn should not require reseeding each year.

## Resources:

### **VIRGINIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION**

[www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/envirohort/426-723/426-723.html](http://www.ext.vt.edu/pubs/envirohort/426-723/426-723.html)  
or contact the Virginia Beach Master Gardener Help Desk at 757-385-8156  
for information on soil tests, spreader calibration and turfgrass

### **LYNNHAVEN RIVER NOW**

[www.LRNow.org](http://www.LRNow.org) / 757-962-5398  
for information on Rain Gardens, Buffer Gardens,  
Water-Friendly Gardening, Lawn Care and Rain Barrels