Lawn Care -- The "Lake-Friendly" Way

Living in the Adirondacks can make caring for a lawn much more challenging than caring for one in the suburbs. The climate, soil, and other environmental conditions can make caring for your lawn a frustrating experience at times.

Mirror Lake Watershed Association

Buffering

- Allowing a natural buffer zone of native plants between the lawn and the water will help prevent bank erosion, and filter out any pollutants carried in runoff water.
- Using native plants in landscaping reduces fertilizer dependence and conserves water, because those species are specially adapted to our climate.
- Buffer zones can retain or enhance property values. Eroded banks and polluted water are not good sellers on the real estate market. They can also be used to screen out undesirable views and noises.

Mowing

- There is a direct relationship between the height of the grass and the depth of the root system. Higher grass = deeper roots = healthier, hardier lawns.
- Keep the grass length at about 3 inches. This is long enough to shade out some unwanted weeds, and to retain soil moisture through shading.
- Leave the lawn clippings on the lawn after mowing, or use a mulching mower. This helps to avoid some runoff, and can decrease your need to fertilize by recycling nutrients.

Fertilizing

- Test your soil before considering application of fertilizer. This should be done approximately every 3 years, in either the spring or fall. Use these results as a baseline for your fertilization needs. To take the sample, take about ½ cup of soil each, from various locations throughout your yard. Mix these together to get a generalized sample for your yard. (Contact your county's office of the Cornell Cooperative Extension for lab locations, www.ccc.cornell.edu)
- If necessary, the use of low- (in the 2-3% range) or no-phosphorus fertilizers is recommended. Large amounts of phosphorus in runoff contribute to algal blooms in the lake, which makes docks and boats slimy, swimming unpleasant, and is bad for the fish and other wildlife. A bag of 10-3-10 mixture means that the blend contains 10% nitrogen, 3% phosphorous and 10% potash.
- Fertilizing in the spring is usually not necessary, especially if you fertilized well in the late fall. Fall fertilizing promotes deep rooting and hardy lawns. Try to apply when the average daily temperature drops to about 50° F everyday for at least a week.
- Ideal times to fertilize are:

  Labor Day (approx. 1lb N/ 1,000 sq. ft.)

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between Halloween and Thanksgiving OR 2 weeks after your last mowing (approx. 1 lb N/ 1,000 sq. ft.)

- For increased accuracy in fertilizer applications, use a drop spreader model rather than a rotary spreader. If you cannot purchase or find a drop spreader model, then be sure to sweep, not hose off, fertilizers, grass clippings, and soils, off paved driveways, sidewalks, or other impenetrable surfaces, to prevent them from being washed into the nearby waterways.
- Healthy trees and shrubs do not require annual fertilization.

Watering

- The most efficient time of day to water your lawn is early in the morning. Watering later in the day causes greater rates of evaporation meaning a greater need to water. Watering in the early evening does not leave enough time for the leaves to dry, and can promote disease on the lawn.
- Watering is only necessary when the first signs of wilt begin to appear.
- Deep, infrequent watering promotes deep root systems. Give the lawn about 1 inch of water when the first signs of wilt show.
- Water at a rate of ¼ - ½ in/hr. More than this will increase runoff and encourage soil erosion.
- Overwatering can wash away soil and fertilizers.

Composting

- Composting is beneficial in so many ways. The product of composting provides a soil rich in nutrients that is more beneficial to gardens and lawns than fertilizers. Compost is also cheaper than fertilizers and keeps some of our wastes out of the landfill. What you need to get started:
- A container that will keep the compost contained, yet allow air in. (Wooden pallets, or a piece of metal fence can work great) (You can also purchase an already-made container)
- A pitchfork or shovel to turn the compost
- Compost material (see examples of good compost materials to the right)

What To Add To Your Compost

- Bread
- Coffee grounds
- Egg shells
- Fruits/Vegetables
- Grass
- Leaves/Hay/Straw
- Paper (not colored)
- Sawdust
- Twigs/branches

Composting Tips:

- Turn the layers regularly (weekly or monthly) to allow oxygen to circulate & encourage decomposition
- Check the moisture level: If it's too dry it will take longer to decompose- too wet and it will start to smell. Add water or dry materials as needed to balance the moisture level.
- Add the finished product (this can take several months to a year) to your garden, flowers, etc.

Native Landscaping Resources:

- Xeriscape and Water Conservation Plants, from the Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Finger Lakes Landscapes: Landscaping for Water Quality in the Finger Lakes Region, from the Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Protected Native Plants of New York State, from the VI District Judges Council of Federated Garden Clubs of New York State, Inc.
- National Wildlife Foundation website www.nwf.org; click on "Your Yard" then "Native Plant Guide"

This flyer was designed by the Lake George Association, Inc., (Lake George, NY). The Mirror Lake Watershed Association thanks the LGA for use of this design.