

A Healthy Lake Michigan

A healthy lake means fish and shellfish are safe to eat, water is safe for swimming, the lake environment is protected from pesticide risks, and pollution prevention is occurring inland with responsible stewardship of properties.



The Issue

Clean water is essential for life. Increasing development across the southern Lake Michigan region means more land devoted to lawns and landscapes; maintenance of this land has led to an increase in water use and more runoff. Residents and landscape companies who manage lawns and landscapes with chemical fertilizers and pesticides are contributing to water pollution in the Lake Michigan watershed. Millions of people get their drinking water from Lake Michigan so it's very important we protect this resource. Each of us can choose to contaminate or protect water with every decision we make about landscaping and lawn care maintenance.



What we put on the land
ends up in our water!

Lawn to Lake is a collaborative program to protect water resources in the Great Lakes region by promoting healthy lawn and landscape practices. With funding from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, partners are coordinating a pollution prevention campaign addressing the needs of those responsible for lawn and landscape care in the Southern Lake Michigan basin. Collaborating partners include Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, Lake Champlain Sea Grant, Safer Pest Control Project, and University of Illinois Extension.



Find us on:  

www.lawntogreatlakes.org

LAWN TO LAKE

Lawn to Lake Program

Lawn to Lake is an outreach project to promote sustainable lawn and landscape practices at the household and community level. Lawn to Lake helps prevent pollution reaching Lake Michigan by working with those responsible for lawn and landscape care to reduce use of pesticides and other toxic substances.

Project Activities

Training for Landscape Professionals and others

- Natural lawn care training workshops for landscape professionals, municipalities, homeowners, schools and child-care providers.

Train the Trainers

- Workshops for Master Gardeners and teachers.

Outreach Program for Retail Stores

- Outreach program to lawn product retailers to promote availability and sale of no-phosphorous lawn fertilizers and other low input lawn products.

Regional Demonstration Sites

- Program in which property owners are converting to natural lawn care.



Natural Lawn and Landscaping Practices

- Focus on building healthy soil.
- Conduct a soil test to learn what nutrients may be needed for proper plant growth.
- Leave lawn clippings on the yard to add beneficial nutrients to the soil.
- Add a top dressing of compost if nutrients are needed.
- Mow lawns high to build deep roots.
- Use as little pesticide and fertilizer chemicals as possible. These chemicals kill beneficial organisms in the soil.
- Use an integrated pest management (IPM) approach when managing pests and plant disease.
- Choose the right plant for the right place. Consider light, type of soil, and water needs.
- Consider lawn alternatives such as native plants.
- Consider what is downstream as you landscape your property in a way that considers what is downstream. Everyone's actions effects those downstream.
- Consider how water flows on your property during a rainstorm. Place plants in such a way that they drink up that water instead of it running off your yard.
- Consider putting in a rain garden.

Pesticides and Our Water

When it rains, pesticides and fertilizers run off our lawns into storm drains, and then into our water. The U.S. Geological Survey found one or more pesticides in every surface water they tested, and one-third of all major groundwater aquifers—both sources often used for drinking water.¹

Nutrients and Our Water

Nutrients essential for plant growth include nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. Following a fertilizer application, plants may not be able to take up all the nutrients, and some may leach below the plant rooting depth. Since water runs downhill, even under ground, these leached nutrients may be transported into the nearest lake or stream.

A Limited Resource

The Great Lakes are the source of drinking water for 42 million people in the U.S. and Canada. In the last 100 years we have added tons of toxins to the limited world supply of freshwater. The very same water we pollute is continuously cycling through our air, soils, and waters and threatening the health and quality of our ecosystems. If we all learn to practice healthy lawn and landscape care, we will be improving the health of the Great Lakes aquatic ecosystem.

¹ Jonathan C. Scott, Paul E. Stackelberg, Gail P. Thelin, and David M. Wolock. 2006. The quality of our nation's waters-Pesticides in the nation's streams and ground water, 1992-2001. Washington DC: United States Geological Survey, Circular 1291. <http://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/2005/1291/>.