

It's LILaC Time

Not the sweet-scented, spring blooming lilacs but it is time to use Low Impact Lawn Care (LILaC) for clean water and a bright future for Rock River Communities.

There are only a couple of simple steps to using LILaC focused on mowing, watering and fertilizing.

MOWING:

1. **Mow High:** Set your mower at the highest possible setting usually between 2.5 and 3". This does two things, first taller grass plants have healthier roots which means a better, thicker turf that can withstand drought and second, the taller, thicker grass shades out weeds. For your last mowing of the year, lower the mower a half to three fourths of an inch to prevent winter problems.
2. **Let it Lie:** There is no good reason to bag clippings unless it has grown too long between mowings. One misconception is that leaving clipping causes thatch build-up. Thatch comes from roots not from grass clippings (plus you get to skip one fertilizer application if you mulch).
3. **Sweep it Up:** When mowing be sure your grass clippings don't end up in the street or driveway, those phosphorus rich blades will end up in your local lake or river feeding the algae. If they do be sure to sweep them up.
4. **Mow Often:** Mow when the grass needs it, not on your schedule. Mow when the grasses are about 4 inches tall if your mower is set at 3 inches. The growth rate is related to the weather, a lawn may require mowing 2-3 times a week in spring, and little during a hot dry summer.
5. **Mow Sharp:** Sharpen your mower's blades 2-3 times each year. Dull blades tear the grass rather than cutting it. The torn blades dry out, giving the grass jagged brown or white tips. This can also make them more susceptible to disease.

WATERING

1. **"Brown is the New Green"** states Jayne Jenks, Waukesha County Conservation Specialist. "Our lawn grasses are cool season grasses that naturally grow best in spring and fall and can go dormant or brown in mid-summer." A brown lawn is mostly an aesthetic concern, extreme heat and drought however, can damage turf to a point where it will need reseeding.
2. **An Inch a Week:** If you can't handle the brown, crisp look, then be sure you're watering correctly: Grass is water stressed when it turns a darker green and foot prints can be seen. To keep it green and growing, water the lawn one inch per week (be sure to count rainfall). Avoid light sprinkling as this promotes shallow root growth. It's much worse to water too little or sporadically then to not water at all.
3. **Sprinkler Choices:** Pick the right sprinkler for the location, they come in many styles and have many different watering patterns. Don't water the sidewalk or road since this water will just run to the nearest storm drain and from there to the river.

FERTILIZING

1. **Test It:** Every three years you should have a soil test done; instructions and sample bags can be picked up at your local county Extension office. Then fertilize according to the results.
2. **Twice a Year Does It:** No soil test? Then use the following general directions for a typical lawn:
 - a. Apply no more than one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet at each application. One-half of this rate is all that is needed in shaded areas.
 - b. Choose a no phosphorus (P) fertilizer (P is the second number on the bag, i.e. 26-0-12). Most Wisconsin soils are very high in phosphorus; this excess phosphorus just runs off to the river where a single pound of phosphorus can grow 500lbs of algae!
 - c. Never fertilize in April through early May.
 - d. The most important time to fertilize is late October, if lawn needs a second application, the next best time is in early June.

Finally a healthy thick lawn is one of the best things you can do to prevent weed growth and soil erosion. By following these steps you should have fewer weeds and a better, stronger turf helping protect our lakes, rivers and streams.

Brought to you by the Rock River Stormwater Group, for more information go to:

www.rockrivercoalition.org/RRB/RRSG.asp.

Resources: Wisconsin Master Gardener www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/richland/hort/documents/lawns05.pdf,
Lawn Care Facts by David Bayer UWEX Outagamie Co.
UW-Extension/WDNR Yard Care and the Environment Series