

Keep your lawn and garden beautiful...and our water clean: Some earth-friendly tips to remember

Did you know that an estimated 70 million pounds of pesticides are applied to lawns nationwide every year?

The chemicals in herbicides and pesticides can pollute our waterways if washed from our lawns and gardens into storm drains that lead directly to our lakes and rivers.

So what can you do to help? Simple. Protect your kids, pets, and the environment from the harmful effects of herbicides and pesticides by choosing earth-friendly landscaping. Here are some steps you can take to maintain your lawn and garden and help keep our water clean.

Select plants native to Michigan. Native plants require less fertilizer and water, and are more disease resistant. Native plants also attract butterflies and birds. Also, a wide variety of plants will help control pests and minimize the need for pesticides. What plants are native to Michigan? Black-eyed Susan, Coral bells, Purple coneflower, and Columbine; blueberry and raspberry bushes; Christmas, Lady, and Maidenhair ferns; Black walnut, Hickory, Douglas fir, and White pine trees are some examples. All are easy to find in most local nurseries and greenhouses.

Remember that lawns need about one inch of water per week. Over-watering results in plants that are less tolerant of heat and drought, and more prone to disease. Avoid raking leaves into storm drains or roadside ditches because they use up water's oxygen and harm fish. Mow leaves into your lawn — they make a good fertilizer! Finally, make your lawn cheaper and easier to maintain by mowing high — three inches is the rule. Tall grass promotes root growth and shades out weeds.

For more easy steps on protecting our lakes and rivers, visit the "Ours to Protect" site at www.semco.org.

SEMCOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, and the Southeast Michigan Partners for Clean Water formed to engage the public in activities that protect our water resources. Throughout the year, this ongoing campaign will focus on simple things the public can do to enhance water quality in the region. SEMCOG surveys have shown a willingness on the part of the public to take action to protect water resources. Remember, it's our water, our future, ours to protect.

SEMCOG is a regional planning partnership of local governmental units serving 4.9 million people in the seven-county region of Southeast Michigan striving to enhance the region's quality of life. [Your community name] is a member of SEMCOG.