

The Milton Stormwater Press

August 2015

Go Natural!

A beautiful yard that's easy to care for is the dream of most homeowners.

Practicing the five steps of Natural Yard Care will help give you a yard that's not only beautiful and low maintenance, but one that is safe and healthy for families, pets, wildlife, and our great Northwest environment.

1. Build healthy soil



In the Pacific Northwest, beautiful yards and gardens all start with healthy soil. Poor soil leads to more work and greater cost: you'll find yourself fertilizing and watering more frequently, and buying new or replacement plants and shrubs far too often.

- When planting lawn or flower beds, dig compost into soil. You can make compost at home or buy it in bags or in bulk.
- Spread mulch around existing plantings in the spring or fall. Composted yard debris, leaves, grass clippings, or bark all work well.
- Need fertilizer? Go organic! Organic fertilizers feed plants longer and are less likely to wash off into our streams.

2. Plant right for the site

Get to know your yard. Where is it sunny or shady? Is the soil dry or soggy? Then select plants that grow well in the Northwest and in the conditions in your yard. The right plants in the right place will thrive without a lot care, water, fertilizer or pesticides. In the wrong situation, plants will struggle no matter how much time and money you spend on them.



- Get to know your site conditions before choosing plants.
- Choose pest-resistant, disease resistant, and drought-tolerant plants.
- Plant trees to provide shade, reduce water needs, slow stormwater runoff, and create wildlife habitat.
- Lawns and vegetables are picky. They'll only grow in sunny, well drained sites.

3. Practice smart watering

The right amount of water leads to healthy, beautiful growth. Too much or too little makes plants susceptible to pests and disease. Smart watering saves money on your water bill and on the cost of replacing plants and shrubs.

- Make every drop count by mulching, selecting drought-tolerant plants, using soaker or drip hoses, and water timers. Water only in the morning or evening to reduce evaporation.
- Be sure to moisten the whole root zone, and let the soil dry before watering again.



*City of Milton
Public Works
1000 Laurel Street
Milton, WA 98354*

- Use automatic irrigation systems efficiently. Check for leaks and have the system tested regularly. Don't water if it's rained recently.
- Let the rain soak in. Direct downspouts onto lawns or garden beds. Help the soil absorb rainfall by building rain gardens or using compost and mulch.

4. Think twice before using pesticides

Scientists have found 23 pesticides in Puget Sound streams, many at levels that can harm salmon and other wildlife. When stormwater flows over our yards and gardens, it picks up pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers and carries them into the waterways we swim, fish, and play in. Overuse of these products is bad for the soil, bad for fish, and bad for our families' health.



- Start with prevention. Select disease-resistant plants, and pull weeds before they spread.
- Identify the problem before you spray. Most bugs are good bugs!
- Select the least toxic control method. Many less toxic alternatives are available. Check out <http://www.growmartgrowsafe.org>, a great resource for learning about which products are less toxic to people, pets, and the environment.
- Only use pesticides as last resort and follow label directions carefully. Some pesticides can seep down through the ground and into the groundwater that supplies our local drinking water.

5. Practice natural lawn care

- Mow higher and leave the clippings. "Grasscycling" doesn't cause thatch, and makes lawns healthier by providing free fertilizer!
- Fertilize moderately in May and September with a "natural organic" or "slow-release" fertilizer. Follow the label directions carefully. More is not better!
- Prevent problems. Weeds are often a symptom of a larger problem, such as soil conditions that are too wet, dry, shady, compacted, or low in fertility.
- Think twice before using "weed and feed" or other pesticides. These products spread pesticides over the whole yard instead of just where they are needed.
- Water deeply and infrequently. Grass needs about one inch per week (including rainfall) in summer and less in the spring and fall.



Sources:

The information included in this edition of the Milton Stormwater Press was taken from the following sources:

Puget Sound Starts Here Natural Yard Care Website:

http://www.naturalyardcare.info/build_healthy_soil.php

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department Natural Yard Care Website

<http://www.tpchd.org/environment/healthy-environment/natural-yard-care/>

City of Tacoma Natural Yard Care Website

http://wscity01.cityoftacoma.org/government/city_departments/environmentalservices/solid_waste_-_garbage_recycling/yard___food_waste_recycling/natural_yard_care/



Only Rain Down the Drain

Report Pollution and Spills

City of Milton

Public Works

253-922-8738