



MINNESOTA WATER
LET'S KEEP IT CLEAN

Article: Spring Tips for Lawns and Lakes
Metro Watershed Partners
Minnesota Water: Let's Keep It Clean

It's an almost impossible urge in Minnesota—as soon as the weather warms up we all want to get out into the yard and start working on something. After all, the season is short and we all want to make the most of it! As you head out with shovel and rake in hand, remember that how we care for our yards affects the health of our rivers, lakes, and wetlands. It's true—rainwater running off of our property into street storm drains—the metal grates in street curbs—can carry soil, nutrients, bacteria and other harmful materials into the waters we love. Be storm drain savvy and follow these yard care tips for cleaner water:

- **Dump no waste!** Never use storm drains for disposing materials, such as engine oil, antifreeze, or cleaners. When you wash your car, wash it on your lawn so dirt and soap does not run into the storm drain. The same goes for when cleaning lawn equipment and tools.
- **Keep soil in place!** Silt from eroding soil fills in wetlands and clogs river and lake bottoms. In addition to destroying wildlife habitat, silt carries phosphorus, the plant nutrient that turns lakes green with algae. Cover bare areas of soil immediately with mulch and plant to a suitable cover. Soil piles from landscaping and construction projects can be covered with tarps to keep from washing away. Be especially careful when planting boulevard gardens so soil does not enter the street.
- **Rake up and sweep up!** Grass clippings and tree seeds and leaves are also sources of phosphorus. Mow so that grass clippings are directed back into the lawn and not into the street. When done mowing, sweep sidewalks, driveways and streets clean of grass clippings. When fall comes, rake the street clean of leaves along with your yard.
- **Pick up after pets!** In addition to containing phosphorus which turns lakes green with algae, pet waste contains bacteria which can lead to beach closings. Collect pet waste in plastic bags and place in the trash. Never use storm drains for disposing pet waste!
- **Soak up the rain!** Natural landscapes soaks rain up like a sponge. As we create hard surfaces like roofs, roads, and parking lots, the amount of rainwater soaking in decreases and the amount of rainwater running off increases. The result is more flooding and more polluted runoff. When possible, direct your downspouts onto vegetated areas where water can soak in. If you are adventurous, you can create a rain garden, a shallow depression designed to capture and soak up rainwater.

- **Follow the law!** Minnesota's new lawn phosphorus fertilizer law requires the use of phosphorus free lawn fertilizer unless when seeding a new lawn or a soil test shows need for phosphorus fertilization. It is also the law to follow label directions when using pesticides. Doing so will protect you, others, our water, and make sure the plants you are trying to protect are not damaged.

These tips can be summarized in the phrase "Only rain down the drain." When rainwater runs off your property, make sure it enters the storm drain clean, and not carrying pollutants it has picked up along the way. You can learn more about these tips by visiting the *Minnesota Water – Let's Keep it Clean* website at www.cleanwatermn.org.

Water is important to life in Minnesota—the land of 10,000 lakes. Let's do our part to protect the water that makes spring – and all the other seasons – so special.

-Ron Struss is a Regional Extension Educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Service and member of Metro Watershed Partners, a coalition of over 40 public, private and non-profit organizations in the metro-area dedicated to educating about protecting water resources. For more information, visit the group's web site at www.cleanwatermn.com.



Caption:

How we care for our yards affects the health of our water. Sweeping up lawn clippings prevents phosphorus from entering lakes and reduces pea-soup green algae blooms.