

## Preserving Our Water

The Des Plaines River area in River Forest is one of the only remaining examples of quality floodplain forest left in the Northeastern Morainal Division of Illinois. More than 250 native plant species and at least 45 bird species help populate the area. Urban lawn care practices such as over-watering, over-fertilizing, and using weed killers negatively impact the water quality and wildlife that depend on it.

River Forest residents can help stop water pollution from lawn and garden activities by making good decisions about the products and practices used to maintain our outdoor spaces such as choosing natural lawn and gardening practices, as opposed to the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

### Other problems with conventional landscaping practices and products

- **Endangering Wildlife:** Many pesticides are toxic to pollinators and aquatic life and have been linked to development, reproductive, behavioral, and immune system problems in wildlife.
- **Threatening Children's Health:** Children are most vulnerable to the health risks from toxic chemicals like pesticides. Studies have found links between the use of lawn pesticides such as Roundup and 2,4 D and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, asthma, hormonal issues, weakened immune function, and acute leukemia.\*

\* *There are no studies available assessing the direct effects of lawn care products on children's health. For more information and references go to <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/lawn/factsheets/30health.pdf>.*



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The mission of Midwest Pesticide Action Center is to reduce the health risks and environmental impacts of pesticides by promoting safer alternatives.

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For more information on how to make good lawn care choices visit Midwest Pesticide Action Center's website or scan the QR code here:



# TIPS ON KEEPING OUR YARDS GREEN & WATERS CLEAN

# RIVER FOREST HEALTHY LAWN, HEALTHY FAMILY

is an educational program that provides the information you need to reduce water pollution and still produce beautiful outdoor spaces that are safe for people and pets to enjoy.



## Alternative Maintenance Practices

To lessen the negative environmental impact of your lawn and garden, try or ask your lawn care provider to use these sustainable practices.

- **Choose electric.** Choose electric or, better yet, human-powered tools, such as push mowers, hand clippers, weeding tools, and rakes rather than gas powered mowers and leaf blowers. Many lawn care providers offer electric powered services.
- **Mow Less and Mow High.** Have your lawn mowed less frequently and raise the height setting on your mower to at least three inches. This will create healthier root systems better able to fight off weeds and drought.
- **Water Correctly.** Water deeply and infrequently to encourage deep root growth. Water in the early morning or at dusk to minimize evaporation. Ideally, you want only one inch of water delivered each week. Use a tuna can to measure when you have reached an inch. Watering correctly is one of the best ways to save money on your water bill.



## Natural Fertilizing

All plants, including grass, need nutrients to thrive. Fertilizers that have a lot of the nutrients, phosphorous and nitrogen can runoff into the Des Plaines River. Runoff leads to harmful algal blooms in water bodies, creating dead zones that compromise the beauty of the water and decrease how many fish and other wildlife it can support. Consider the following alternatives.

- **Soil Sampling.** Before adding fertilizer to your lawn, make sure it needs it. Conduct or ask your lawn care provider for a soil sample and add only the nutrients your lawn is lacking.
- **Choose Organic.** Buy or ask your lawn care provider to use organic fertilizers instead of conventional ones. Look for products that contain plant and animal byproducts (such as alfalfa meal, fish meal, and rock phosphate).
- **Grass Cycling.** Grass cycling, or leaving grass clippings on the lawn, is a great, natural, and free alternative to synthetic fertilizers.
- **Compost.** Instead of throwing away your yard and food waste, consider composting it. The compost created serves as an inexpensive, nutrient-rich soil amendment that can replace or supplement fertilizer use. Pre-made compost can also be bought at most home and garden stores.\*

\* Host your next Block Party Green and get free or discounted composters. Go to [www.vrf.us/residents/block-party-permits](http://www.vrf.us/residents/block-party-permits) for more information.

## Natural Weed Control

Herbicides are pesticides used to kill unwanted plants. Like fertilizers, these toxic chemicals can runoff into the Des Plaines River making their way to other waterways negatively affecting the wildlife species living downstream.

Weeds are often a symptom of larger problems such as poor soil health or bad maintenance practices. Use these simple tips to eliminate common weed problems:

- **Crabgrass.** To eliminate crabgrass, keep lawns at least 3 inches high and deliver one inch of water to your lawn each week (including rainfall).
- **Dandelions and Plantains.** To prevent dandelions and plantains from appearing, aerate your soil and add nutrients by top dressing with compost to improve soil health.
- **Creeping Charlie.** The presence of Creeping Charlie indicates excessive moisture and compaction. Place dirt in low areas in the lawn to eliminate poorly draining spots. Reseed and top dress to outcompete this weed.

In instances where weeds are sparse, hand picking with a sturdy weeding tool is the best solution. Other more natural pesticides include soaps, horticultural oils, plant-based insecticides, or vinegar. Ask your lawn care provider about natural choices for weed control.

