



Lawn Care & Landscaping Guide

2023



ProjectClarity
Restoring the Macatawa Watershed

Project Clarity

Project Clarity is a division of ODC Network that works with the community to improve the water quality of Lake Macatawa and the surrounding streams. The practices we pursue in caring for our lawns and landscapes have a direct impact on local water quality, so being mindful and choosing sustainable practices when possible makes a great difference. Protect water quality by following the sustainable practices in this guide or trust your lawn and landscape to one of our local Lawn Care & Landscaping Partners.

To be a Project Clarity Partner, a lawn care or landscaping company agrees to the following:

- The company observes the Michigan Fertilizer Act related to the use of fertilizers and best practices that must be used when applying fertilizers.
- Prior to applying fertilizer, the size of the lawn is measured to ensure the correct amount of fertilizer is applied.
- Grass is cut no shorter than three inches to promote a healthier lawn that needs less water and fertilizer.
- All grass clippings and fertilizer are swept or blown off of impervious surfaces back into lawns to prevent runoff to storm drains. Every attempt is made to keep grass clippings from directly entering surface water bodies such as drains, streams and lakes.
- Mulching is preferred, but if grass clippings are taken off site, they are stored and composted properly so materials are not washed away in stormwater runoff.
- The company makes customers aware of best management practices for water quality and water conservation (i.e. native plant use, waterfront landscaping, rain barrels, irrigation timers/sensors, etc.).
- The company makes an effort to be aware of potential non-native invasive plant species, monitor for them and make clients aware when they are present on their property.

Proper Mowing

Lawn mowing is one of the most important chores in regular lawn maintenance. Improper mowing can harm water quality and even the grass itself! Follow these mowing tips to increase the health of your lawn, save time and money, and protect your watershed.

Mow when the grass reaches no more than 4.5" tall and mow down to 3". Taller blades promote a healthier lawn, and healthy lawns require less maintenance, including water, fertilizer and pesticides.

If possible, use a mulch mower to return clippings to your lawn. This natural fertilizer will reduce the amount you have to buy and apply. However, do not leave clippings on paved surfaces. Lawn clippings left on sidewalks and roads will be washed away by rain into lakes and streams. Once in the water, they breakdown into nutrients that can lead to algal blooms and harm the aquatic ecosystem.

No matter what mowing strategies you practice, ensure that no clippings are left on paved areas, even driveways. Sweep or blow them off back into the lawn, and do your part to keep our water resources beautiful and healthy for years to come!



Did you know...

Healthy lawns provide many benefits including removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and producing oxygen for us to breathe. Lawns are also cooler than the surrounding paved surfaces, providing relief to bare feet in the hot summer months. Healthy lawns protect the soil from erosion and will allow more rain water to infiltrate compared to unhealthy lawns. Finally, healthy lawns improve curb appeal, which can increase the value of your home.

Proper Fertilization



The first step in fertilization is to test your soil so you know what your lawn needs. Plants will not use excess fertilizer, so more is not better. If you choose to apply in the spring, wait until the ground thaws. The best time to fertilize in Michigan is in the fall.

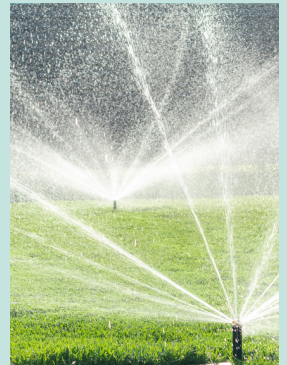


If you use commercial fertilizer, choose one without phosphorus and never apply near open water. Any excess not used by plants, or what ends up on paved surfaces, can become water pollution when washed away by rain.

Some of the easiest fertilizer, applicable for nearly all lawn owners, is leaving some of your grass clippings for the essential nutrients they provide. Plus, best of all, it's free!

Proper Watering

Most plants, lawns included, only need about 1" of water, plus the amount that evaporates, applied in small amounts throughout the week. Light, frequent watering supports a healthier lawn. Water 15-20 minutes a day between noon and 4pm. Monitor grass and soil moisture and adjust as needed. Do not overwater as this can damage your lawn and harm local waterways through increased runoff.



Just like any other plant, grass goes through cycles during the growing season. During especially hot months, brown tips may be visible. This is normal and does not indicate a need for increased watering. In fact, overwatering can lead to grass death, which produces even more brown color! Err on the side of caution and use less, which saves time and money, as well as our lakes and streams!



Lawn Alternatives

Traditional lawn maintenance requires regular mowing, fertilizing and watering. These activities, if not done properly, can lead to water pollution and other concerns. Replacing traditional turf lawns with lawn alternatives, like clover, is a great way to make your lawn and landscape more sustainable.

Clover lawns (bottom left) are more sustainable than traditional turf because they require less water and other inputs. Clover has longer roots compared to turf that are able to seek water deeper in the soil. In the summer, an average grass lawn uses over 125 gallons of water each time it is watered. Alternative lawns rarely need to be watered. Another benefit of clover is that it promotes healthy pollinator populations. Flowering plants are one of the most important food sources for urban pollinators throughout the summer, so by replacing a grass lawn with a clover lawn, pollinators can thrive.

Other types of lawn alternatives include sedges (bottom center) and liriopse which are more grass like, and groundcovers like Ajuga and creeping thyme (bottom right). These alternatives add color and texture while requiring less maintenance and supporting pollinators.

You can also reduce your lawn by adding other elements like vegetable gardens or native plant gardens, expanding existing landscape beds, or planting trees and shrubs. All of these can help reduce the amount of maintenance you have to do and your lawn's impact on the environment.



Native Plants

Like lawn alternatives, native plants are a great way to make your lawn or landscape more sustainable. Landscaping with native plants attracts pollinators to your yard, protects water quality, and improves soil structure. Native plants can also decrease the amount of regular yard work required while improving the aesthetic of your yard!



Manage Stormwater

In addition to alternative plants in your lawn and landscape, there are many things you can do to promote sustainability in your yard. Managing stormwater helps decrease flooding, water pollution, and erosion.



Ways to manage stormwater include capturing rain water in rain barrels, installing rain gardens, replacing turf grass with native plants, and planting trees. Collectively, we refer to these practices as rainscaping.



The ODC Network offers the Macatawa Rainscaping program to all Macatawa Watershed residents. This program starts with a free site assessment and recommendations from a trained volunteer or professional about how to better manage stormwater on your property. Scan the QR code to learn more and sign up for your free site assessment.



Lawn Care & Landscaping Partners

AAA Lawn Care, Inc. ----- (616) 399-4646
www.aaalawncare.com

Advantage Landscape & Turf Management ----- (616) 886-6734
www.advantagelandscape1.com

Aesthetic Gardener, LLC ----- (616) 218-2698
www.aestheticgardener.net

Complete Lawn & Landscaping Services ----- (616) 510-3076
www.clslawnservice.com

Dale's Mowing Service LLC ----- (616) 399-5429

Evergreen Landscaping ----- (616) 399-6876
www.evergreenlandscapinginc.com

Integrity Landscape Management, LLC ----- (616) 688-7600
integritylandscape.net

Good Sweet Earth ----- (616) 594-0693
www.goodsweetearth.com

Landscape Design Services ----- (616) 399-1734
www.landscapedesign.com

North Town Landscape & Lawn Care ----- (616) 399-8047

Perma Green Lawn Care, Inc ----- (616) 786-3697
www.permagreenlawncare.com

Top Cut Lawn Care Services ----- (616) 218-9572
www.topcutlawncareservices.com

Wabeke Lawn Service and Snow Plowing ----- (616) 896-5296
wabeke.com



Established in 2016, ODC Conservation Services provides sustainable land & invasive species management, ecological restoration, and wildlife habitat improvement services to public and private land owners of West Michigan.

Contact us today for a free consultation.

outdoordiscovery.org/conservation-services