keep it BLUE
only rain in the drain

Lawn Care Guidelines ~City of Niles

Help keep our streams, rivers, lakes and drinking water clean and healthy!

The City of Niles is seeking to minimize the discharge of pollutants related to the storage, handling and use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers on land that the City manages. BMPs required under this measure include a turf management plan for maintaining public lands and parks, employee training, and soil testing for nutrients (nitrogen/phosphorus/potassium) to determine appropriate fertilizer usage on all lands that the City maintains. Fertilizers shall be applied only in accordance with recommendations based on soil test results.

Maintaining Turf Areas. It is important to select a type of grass that can withstand drought and that becomes dormant in hot, dry seasons. The grass should not be cut shorter than 3 to 4 inches in height to establish strong, healthy roots and shade out weeds. When possible, mulched clippings should be left on the lawn as a natural fertilizer. Sweep or blow fertilizer and grass clippings back onto the lawn and not into the street to prevent them from getting into storm drains and ditches, which can cause algae problems. Don't dump lawn clippings or rake leaves into storm drains, waterbodies or roadside ditches.

Fertilizing. Soils should be tested every 3 to 4 years to determine the amount of nutrients necessary to maintain a healthy lawn. If needed, as indicated from a soil test, use less-toxic alternatives, such as composted organic material or use slow release formulas. Warm season grasses should be fertilized in the summer, in frequent and small doses, while cool season grasses should be fertilized in the fall. Fertilizer should not be applied on a windy day or immediately before a heavy rain. Fertilizer cannot be applied to frozen soil or soil saturated with water. Any fertilizer released onto a hard surface, such as a sidewalk or driveway must be cleaned up promptly. Maintain at least a 15' application buffer from surface water (lake, river, stream, ditch). Also do not apply fertilizers within 15 feet of a storm drain. Starting January 1, 2012, a person shall not apply any fertilizer with available phosphate (P2O5) to turf. Available phosphate (P2O5) may be applied at specified rates under the following instances:

- When a soil test or plant tissue test indicates phosphorus is needed;
- For new turf establishment using seed or sod;
- A finished sewage sludge (biosolid), organic manure or a manipulated manure (like compost). The application rate is limited to 0.25 pounds of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet.
- On golf courses whose manager(s) have completed a MDARD approved training program. At this time, the Michigan Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Program is the only approved program.

Using Pesticides. Like fertilizers, pesticides should be used on lawns only when necessary. It is important to identify any potential pests to determine if they are truly harmful to the plant. The pests should always be removed by hand when possible; chemical pest control should be used

only when other approaches fail. If it is necessary to use chemical pesticides, the least toxic pesticide that targets the specific pest in question should be chosen (i.e., boric acid, garlic, insects, etc). If a pesticide is labeled with the word "caution," it is less toxic than one labeled "warning," which is, in turn, less toxic than one that is labeled "danger/poison." Follow the label directions on the pesticide. Crews must wear the appropriate protective equipment listed on the label when working with organophosphate insecticides or concentrated sprays or dusts. Read and follow all safety precautions listed on pesticide labels and wash hands and face before smoking or eating. Tools or equipment that were used to apply or incorporate pesticides should always be rinsed in a bucket and the rinse water applied as if it were full-strength pesticide.

Irrigating. Much of the water that is applied to lawns is not absorbed by the vegetation. When water is applied too quickly, it is lost as runoff along with the top layers of soil. To prevent this, use low-volume watering approaches such as drip-type or sprinkler systems.

Using Mulch. Place a thick layer of mulch (four inches) around trees and plants. This helps retain water, reduce weeds, and minimizes the need for pesticides. Mulches help retain water, reduce weed growth, prevent erosion, and improve the soil for plant growth. Mulches usually contain wood bark chips, wood grindings, pine straws, nut shells, small gravel, or shredded landscape clippings.

Selecting Plants. Choose native plants which are generally more water efficient, require less fertilizer and are more disease resistant. Furthermore, exotic plants can potentially invade local waterways. Making maintained lawn areas smaller by creating more planting areas with native plants will help infiltrate more water and reduce the amount getting into storm drains. Rain gardens can be used in low areas where rainwater collects to trap, absorb, and filter stormwater. Diversify plantings because using a wide variety of plants helps control pests and minimize the need for pesticides.