

## Clean Water Starts at Home with Healthy Lawn and Garden Practices!

Summer has arrived in Northeast Ohio, and the time has come to start planning your lawn and garden activities for the 2022 growing season, and perhaps even long-term goals beyond this year. When you prioritize your goals, please keep in mind that maintaining your yard and garden with healthy landscaping practices is the most important action that you can take toward improving water quality in our streams, rivers, and lakes.

The first item on your list of healthy practices should be to have your soil tested. The results of this soil test will show if you need to add fertilizer to your soil. Excess fertilizer that runs off the soil in a rainstorm enters our waterways and causes algae blooms, fish kills, and degraded water quality. Tests have shown that we have excess phosphorous in our streams in Summit County, so you would never want to add phosphorous fertilizer if you don't need it. The soil test will also save you money because you won't be buying something that you don't need.

After you have your soil test results, here are some tips for starting off the year right with healthy landscaping practices:

- If your soil test results advise you to amend your soil, use organic, slow-release products which will feed your plants and soil and not run off with every rain event.
- Don't leave fertilizer pellets and grass clippings on your driveway, patio, or other hard surfaces because the pellets will run off into the stormdrain with the first rainstorm, and the stormdrain is connected directly to a stream, river, or lake. Never apply fertilizers if rain is in the forecast.
- Keep your mower blades sharp, and mow high at 3-4 inches, since this encourages root growth and stability, and let the clippings lie on the lawn for nutritional value.
- If you want to try composting, you can start your compost pile in the spring using grass clippings and winter woody debris and leaves.
- By eliminating the use of pesticides, you will not only protect your children and pets who play in your yard, but also the wildlife including pollinators and beneficial insects.
- If you have a stream or pond in your yard, you can create and plant a vegetated buffer zone along the edges using native plants. This riparian vegetation will provide beauty and wildlife habitat, filter stormwater, and prevent non-point source pollution.

- Finally, if you are feeling particularly adventurous this year, you can shrink your lawn by adding native plant gardens and/or fruit and nut-producing shrubs and trees which provide food for you, your family, and the wildlife community.

To find out about other ideas for creating and maintaining a beautiful outdoor space that provides many ecological benefits, you can go to <https://sswcd.summitoh.net/> or call 330-926-2452, and you can check out our facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/Summit-Soil-and-Water-Conservation-District-170451803004991/>.