

FOUR-SEASON YARD WORKER TIP SHEET FOR RESPONSIBLE LANDSCAPE CARE To improve properties, water, and watershed

Visit www.norwalkriver.org and Protecting the Watershed and Plant Life & Invasives for links to more information and other helpful sites, including rain gardens. On the home page click to download CT and NY versions of “How to Manage and Landscape Your Property.”

Spring Maintenance

- Sweep up leftover sand from sidewalks and driveway, store in buckets for next winter. Don't dump swept-up sand (contains salt and other pollutants) into gardens, wetlands, or woods.

- Locate an area on the property for a long-term compost pile. Composting will save money; avoid need for expensive, potentially harmful chemical fertilizers; and provide rich organic material to benefit plants naturally.

- Do NOT blow/rake leaves and other organic matter into streams, ponds, or wetlands; they harm plants and beneficial wildlife, make ponds shallower, enrich water and encourage algae, speed up the need for dredging and aerators, and may incur fines or costly mitigation.

- Recycle fall leaves by using them as a base for a new compost pile, or chop up leaves (with a lawn mower or shredder) for mulch around shrubs and on planting beds.

- Mulch 2" deep around trees, shrubs, planting areas to reduce moisture loss, cool plants, and reduce weeds. Keep mulch off tree/shrub bark to avoid killing the plant and off plant crowns to avoid root rot. Avoid fresh wood chips that rob plants of nitrogen. Consider chopped leaves, pine needles, shredded bark, Sweet Peet.

- Spread thin layer of compost on lawn and planting areas in late spring to provide organic nutrients for healthy growth. Check Public Works Dept. for compost.

- Avoid 2-in-1 mix of pesticides and fertilizers.

- Use non-toxic alternatives to chemical pesticides. Good alternatives are horticultural oils, Neem oil, and soap solutions.

- Reduce or eliminate lawn areas and extra care and water they require. Plant groundcovers, or native grasses (e.g., little bluestem) with perennial wildflowers for a meadow look that will endure.

- At the beginning of April, note and I.D. the first non-evergreen plants to leaf out (likely invasive Japanese barberry, winged euonymus, Japanese honeysuckle, multiflora rose, garlic mustard). Research right method to control each, then dig out or control. See Winter.

- Install a wide buffer of native plantings 3' tall to block geese's view of water to deter their presence, droppings, and polluting runoff.

- Check pruning timing for shrubs and trees: right after flowering in spring or in fall, according to plant. Even native plants need some pruning for size and shape.

Summer Care

- Save water. Water before 9 AM to minimize evaporation and disease. Lawns need maximum 1" water per week from rain or irrigation. Do not overwater or water more than once per week. Frequent watering discourages deep root growth and weakens grass. In drought, do not water; lawns can green up after browning.

- Established trees/shrubs do not require water, except in drought. Reduced growth keeps pruning down and prolongs the life of the plant that will outgrow its space.

- Use a rain gauge or place shallow can under sprinkler to measure water levels. Install an inexpensive rain sensor on an automatic sprinkler system to effectively prevent sprinklers from coming on during or after rain.

- Keep mower blades sharp to reduce moisture loss and prevent disease spread. Mow lawn 2.5-3" minimum. Use a mulching mower to let grass clippings or chopped leaves fertilize the lawn.

- Mow a curved (not straight, downhill) path to stream or pond to slow runoff and pollution, to allow for more absorption, and to deter geese if other vegetation is high.

- Continue to weed and re-mulch where necessary, but remove mulch every three years if 2" is added annually.

Fall Leaves and Fertilization

- Don't blow or dump leaves into waterways, wetlands, roadsides, or open lands. Compost them. Chop and compost leaves for spring use or broadcast them into woodlands to decompose naturally rather than bag or trash this valuable and nutritious resource.

- Fertilize the lawn with a single dose of slow-release, organic fertilizer in early fall for a healthy spring lawn.

- In late fall, to avoid disease, remove spent annuals and dead leaves/flowers from perennials; add to compost pile, unless diseased, in which case, put in garbage.

Winter De-icing and Planning

- Avoid rock salt to de-ice sidewalks and driveways. Rock salt can harm aquatic and plant life and eat into pavement, concrete foundations. Use Calcium Chloride or Calcium Magnesium Acetate (CMA) products to melt ice, or use plain sand if only traction is needed.

- Sweep up sand from sidewalks and driveway in between storms, re-use for the next storm.

- Plan to remove invasives; replace them in the spring with native trees, shrubs, plants, or groundcovers that require less water and care, and attract wildlife.

- Plan a rain garden by directing downspouts and runoff into an area designed with proper drainage and planted with native, low-maintenance bushes, shrubs, and perennial flowers that can live through flood and drought.

