

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Eco-Friendly Fall Lawn Care Tips

Taking care of your lawn in an environmentally friendly way during the fall can help you maintain a beautiful and healthy yard and help to protect Dover's land and water. It may even save you money. Homeowners should be aware that they are responsible for what lawn care contractors and landscapers do on their property and should discuss lawn care options with all contractors to help protect our health and environment.

Here are some eco-friendly fall lawn care tips:

AVOID PESTICIDES: Minimize or eliminate the use of chemical pesticides and herbicides that can leach into our water resources, pose health risks and contaminate our natural resources. Consider natural alternatives or integrated pest management (IPM) techniques and discuss these options with your lawn care company if you use one. For more information about transitioning to and maintaining an organic lawn visit: <https://www.beyondpesticides.org>

NOTE: Herbicides, pesticides and synthetic fertilizers should NEVER be used in or within 100 feet of wetlands, ponds or streams or within 200 feet of rivers in order to protect these valuable natural resources.

FERTILIZE NATURALLY: Use organic and slow-release fertilizers to promote healthy soil and grass growth. Avoid synthetic fertilizers that can leach into the groundwater and waterways and harm the environment. Organic fertilizers are easy to apply and come in easy-to-use organic liquid fertilizers as well as slow-release granular types. Organic and slow low-release fertilizers applied in the fall will be ready to nurture the new growth in the spring. Synthetic fertilizers merely feed the plants and actually rob the soil of important nutrients, thereby demanding the perpetual need for more chemicals to attain the desired result.

Look for organic and slow release fertilizers at your local nursery or order online. North Country Organics has a number of natural fertilizers, including phosphorus-free fertilizers for lawns close to wetlands and water bodies (see <https://www.noorganics.org>). Other natural choices include Peaceful Valley Farm Supply (see <https://www.groworganic.com>), Down To Earth's Bio-Turf (see <https://www.downtoearthdistributors.com>), and Harmony Farm (see <https://www.harmonystfarm.com>.)

WATER WISELY: When Dover experiences drought conditions, as we did last year, avoid watering your lawn or do so sparingly and early in the morning to reduce evaporation. Turn off your irrigation system if there is enough rain, like this year. Use a rain barrel to collect rainwater for watering your lawn. If you are served by the Aquarion Water Company, this will save you money. Rain barrels can be purchased from the DPW at the Town Garage or the Dover Transfer Station and at many home improvement stores. Please call the DPW at 508-785-0058, ext. 110 before arriving to purchase these items to ensure inventory is available.

CLEAN-UP RESPONSIBLY: When cleaning up your yard, avoid blowing or raking leaves into the street where they can clog storm drains and catch basins, which can lead to water pollution and cause flooding.

COMPOST LEAVES: Instead of raking leaves into bags to be disposed of at a landfill, compost them. Shredded leaves make excellent compost that can enrich your garden or flower beds and you

can also bring them to the leaf compost area at the Dover Transfer Station. In addition, compost bins can be purchased from the Town Garage or Transfer Station and at many home improvement stores. Please call the DPW at 508-785-0058, ext. 110 before arriving to purchase these items to ensure inventory is available. You can also make your own compost bin (see <https://www.sunset.com/garden/backyard-projects/build-perfect-compost-bin>)

MULCH LEAVES: If you don't want to compost leaves, you can also shred them with a mulching mower and leave them on the lawn. This adds organic matter to the soil.

MOW HIGH: Before the first frost, raise the height of your mower blades to around 2.5 to 3 inches. Taller grass shades the soil and helps retain moisture, reducing the need for watering and promoting healthier roots. Thicker, healthier grass in the spring discourages weed growth.

LEAVE GRASS CLIPPINGS: Don't bag your grass clippings. Use the mulching 'setting' on your mower and leave them on the lawn. This adds valuable nutrients back into the soil – saving fertilizer costs. This practice is known as "grasscycling."

AERATE: If your soil is compacted, consider aerating your lawn in the fall. Aeration helps improve water infiltration and root growth. Ask a landscaping service about this or rent an aerator at a local equipment rental or home improvement store.

OVERSEED: Overseeding your lawn in the fall can help thicken it and fill in bare spots. Thicker grass leaves less room for weeds and eliminates the need for herbicides. Choose native or drought-resistant grass species that require less water and maintenance.

USE MANUAL TOOLS: Use a rake instead of a leaf blower to gather leaves. Leaf blowers are noisy and are a significant producer of greenhouse gas emissions. For example, the car company Edmunds estimated that driving a Ford F-150 Raptor truck from Texas to Alaska would emit the same amount of air pollution as a mere half-hour of yard work with a two-stroke, gas-powered leaf blower. Indeed, Edmunds estimated that some gas leaf-blowers generate 23 times the carbon dioxide of the Raptor and 300 times more non-methane hydrocarbons.

PLANT NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS: Fall is a great time to plant native trees and shrubs up until the first frost. They require less maintenance and provide habitat for local wildlife. The Native Plant Guide and the Plant Nursery at the Native Plant Trust/Garden in the Woods in Framingham, provides extensive information on native plants and how to convert your lawn into a native landscape as well as avoid and manage invasive plants and is an excellent place to go to see how native plants can be used in landscaping. For more info visit <http://www.nativeplanttrust.org>

REDUCE LAWN AREA: Consider reducing the size of your lawn by planting more native plants or creating natural areas with less grass area. This can save water, create wildlife habitat and reduce maintenance.

By following these environmentally friendly fall lawn care tips, you can maintain a beautiful lawn and support a healthy ecosystem in your yard. You might even save some time and money!

The Conservation Commission is charged with protecting the Town's wetlands, natural resources and open space. If you're planning a construction project or tree cutting and you think there may be wetlands on your property, please contact the Commission office by calling 508- 785-0032 extension 7 or emailing us at conservation@doverma.org.

Thank you for helping to protect our land and water!