

BEST PRACTICES



Healthy Yards Start in the Fall

Fall is a very important time of the year to prepare your lawn, garden and landscaped areas for the upcoming winter. The work you complete this fall will benefit your yard for the year to come, so don't miss the opportunity to complete these important steps:

1. Gardens and Shrubbery Beds

Gardens and shrubbery beds are the perfect place to put all those leaves you rake from your yard this fall. They provide protection from the cold winter and also add nutrients to the soil as they decompose over the next several months. If you don't have leaves to rake, a two- to three-inch layer of compost will work great, too.

2. Lawns

If you desire a healthy lawn with minimal weeds, September through October is your window to get there! First, rent an aerator from your local rental store to aerate your lawn. Second, spread a very thin layer of fine compost over the lawn. Third, spread a Pacific Northwest blend of grass seed over the top. If you plan to fertilize, use a "natural" or "slow release" formula, which will feed your lawn slowly over the next couple months, unlike the quick-greening formulas that will wash away after the first couple of rainy fall days (and pollute local waters).

3. Watering

You should reduce your watering substantially through September. Once a week or less should be all your lawn will need. Once the rains come in October, remember to turn off your irrigation system and drain the lines. If you water with a hose and sprinkler, be sure to drain and put away your equipment for the winter to prevent damage. If you have soaker hoses, you can either put those away for the winter or leave them in place and cover them with several inches of mulch (bark, leaves or compost).

What is a Slow-Release Fertilizer?

Slow-release or organic fertilizers are often made from natural ingredients and tend to feed your lawn slowly over time, reducing the risk for runoff. Slow-release fertilizers have small N-P-K numbers such as 4-z-8. Fertilizers with larger N-P-K numbers (such as 29-23) are typically synthetic fertilizers that can cause rapid plant growth, but are more likely to runoff into lakes and streams or to leach into groundwater.

For more information about how to select a slow-release fertilizer check out this "Fertilizer - A Common Sense Guide" produced by Thurston County Public Health: <https://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehcsg/pdf/FertilizerGuide.pdf>

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