

BEST PRACTICES



Natural Yard Care for Fall

Natural yard care is a practical way to create a lovely yard that's easier to care for and healthier for families, pets and wildlife. Whether it's planting, mulching or aerating your lawn, the effort you put in this fall will reap big benefits next spring and summer. By making some simple changes to your yard care routine, you can save time and money and help protect our local waterways.

Go Ahead and Plant

Planting in fall gives plants a jump-start on next spring's growing season. Natural rains and cooler fall temperatures help keep soils moist so new plants can establish healthy root systems. Plants will keep growing until the first frost when they move into winter dormancy. Here are a few things to keep in mind when choosing plants:

- **Select the right plant** – Conditions within your yard may vary from sunny to shady and moist to dry. Soil conditions may even change. Take note of these changes and choose the right plant for the right spot in your yard. This is the first step toward an easy to care for yard that is pesticide free.
- **Choose native and drought tolerant plants** – Native plants provide shelter and food for wildlife and require less water. Common native plants for landscaping include sword fern, vine maple, salal, oceanspray, bald hip rose and salmonberry. Visit nativeplantsalvage.org for information about planting natives in your yard.
- **Build healthy soil** – Plants need good soil to thrive. Healthy plants are more resilient with fewer pest problems and lower water needs. After you plant, mulch beds with compost or leaves.

Keep Leaves for Free Compost

Composting yard debris has tremendous environmental benefits for both the planet and your yard. Valuable nutrients stay in your yard while adding nutrient-rich compost improves soil quality and reduces the need for chemical fertilizers.

Reasons to compost:

- Compost added to soil, or top-dressed on lawns, releases nutrients to plants slowly over time. This helps prevent nutrient leaching into our wetlands, rivers, lakes and Puget Sound.
- Organic matter present in compost increases water retention, air circulation and root penetration in the soil.
- Adding compost to soil or mulching with compost helps prevent soil erosion. When soil erodes, sediment particles carry pollutants such as oils, metals and chemicals into stormwater runoff.
- Compost increases soil's ability to infiltrate water & decrease stormwater runoff.



For more information on practicing home composting or vermiculture contact the Thurston County Master Gardener Program at: <http://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/gardening/>

Harvest Rainwater from Your Roof

Rainwater harvesting can have important environmental and economic pay-offs. It reduces stormwater runoff and saves on water use. Collecting rainwater from impervious surfaces, such as roofs, and storing it for later use, has been done for ages. Limited water resources and stormwater pollution are increasingly serious problems. With the emergence of green building, the role that rainwater harvesting can play has become more apparent.

Rainwater reuse brings a number of benefits:

- Provides inexpensive supply of water
- Reduces stormwater runoff and pollution
- Reduces erosion
- Provides water for irrigation or non-potable indoor uses
- Helps reduce peak summer demands

Early fall is a great time to install a rain barrel or two for your home. Residential rain barrels are an inexpensive and easy retrofit that can help reduce stormwater runoff and your water bill. If you live in the City of Olympia or Tumwater you may be eligible for a rain barrel rebate, to find out more visit:

City of Olympia: www.olympiawa.gov/waterwise

City of Tumwater:

<https://www.ci.tumwater.wa.us/departments/public-works/utilities/rebates-and-incentives>

Reinvigorate Your Tired Lawn

The high temperatures and dry days of summer can take a toll on your lawn. Fall is the perfect time to help your lawn recover and give it a boost for next year.

Tips to create a healthier, more resilient lawn:

- **Aerate for healthier lawn** – When the soil beneath your lawn is compacted, it leads to shallower and weaker grass roots and poor lawn appearance. Aeration pulls plugs from the soil to optimize nutrient, air, and water flow. This improves soil texture, structure, density and porosity and increases nutrient uptake by grass roots. Aeration also decreases stormwater runoff through rainfall absorption.
- **Overseed for a thick lawn** – Thick lawns can outcompete weeds, retain more moisture and look and feel great! Overseed with a Pacific Northwest seed blend following aeration. Keep seeds moist during germination.
- **Topdress with compost** – After aerating add organic matter and nutrients to your soil by topdressing with a ¼" of organic compost. Simply rake it into the lawn and let the rain do the rest.
- **Rake fallen leaves off your lawn to avoid lawn dieback** – Alternatively, you can mulch mow light layers of leaves into your lawn.

Visit <http://olympiawa.gov/city-utilities/water-resources/pollution-prevention/natural-yard-care.aspx> to check out our natural lawn care video series and get detailed guidance on each of these steps.



Remove Invasive Plants Now

Problem weeds can quickly overtake a yard and surrounding local habitat. Some are toxic to humans and pets. Problem weeds include knotweed, scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry, English ivy and tansy ragwort. For more information on controlling and disposing of noxious weeds, visit Thurston County's website at www.co.thurston.wa.us/tcweeds.

Source: Stream Team News, Fall 2019

