

BEST PRACTICES



The Sweet (& Safe) Smell of Spring!

Welcome new life, sweet smells, and hopefully warmer evenings! Spring has sprung, and now is the time of celebration after a long, dark winter. Among early sunrises and extended evenings outside, serenaded by the happy return of bird song, it's time to start putting those long-awaited winter yard plans into action.

Whether your plans include native plants, eco lawn mixes, vegetable beds, or fruit trees, make sure you're practicing natural yard care. Doing so can ensure your yard is lush, beautiful, AND safe for your family, pets, and the community. Follow these simple steps to set your yard up for a thriving, beautiful growing season.

STEP 1: Take Inventory

All yards have their micro-climates. Look around your yard during different times of the day. Notice areas of sun, shade, drought, and soggy. Take stock of your perennials. Do they look healthy? Do they offer different seasonal interests? Do you plan to plant annuals? Where do you have a lawn? How is it doing? Do you want that area to remain a monocrop (common fescue) lawn, or would you prefer to transition to an eco-lawn mix this season? Eco lawns are much less energy intensive and attract pollinators. They require very little water and no added fertilizers. Where does your yard need mulch? Compost? Has soggy been an issue? You might consider aerating and dethatching this spring. Have you had problems with moles in the past? Consider changing what you grow in this area; mole activity indicates good soil! Learn more about mole management at [youtube.com/watch?v=jVCKl7ua9a0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVCKl7ua9a0).

STEP 2: Know Your Soil

Speaking of good soils... Have you taken a soil sample of your yard in the last three years? If not, this could be the year for you to collect and submit one. A basic soil test is fine. Your soil test results will help you know how to balance your soil's pH and understand where you may have nutrient deficiencies. You will also discover your organic matter percentages, which will help you identify if you have too much thatch buildup, likely from years of over-fertilizing. Learn more about soil testing at thurstoncd.com/working-lands/soil-testing.



Pro Tip: Plant Densely & in Succession

A fun option to consider for your yard this year is planting for full, all-season blooms. Plant successional! Planting this way ensures continuous blooms and seasonal pops of interest and color in your yard! Dense, layered plantings shade out weeds and prevent them from taking over. A bonus to native plants is that they require zero fertilization and attract beneficial pollinators so that you can achieve your goal of a thriving, beautiful yard—naturally!

STEP 3: Find Balance & Get Planting

Once you know where you're at, it's time to balance your soil and get to planting. For an overview of tips and tricks, check out this free online course from Thurston County at rb.gy/zhrr6i.

STEP 4: "Grow Smart & Grow Safe"

Most bug and weed killers are toxic to animals and humans. They seep into the ground, or stormwater runoff carries them into our lakes and creeks. Quick-release fertilizers are very damaging, especially in stormwater runoff that flows into our lakes (think algae blooms). If you need to use fertilizer, opt for the slow-release organic option. Avoid weed and feed products as they kill the beneficial organisms in your soil that keep it healthy. The best way to respond to and prevent pests and weeds, is to find a real solution. This means we must address the conditions that allowed them to grow in the first place. When in doubt, reach out! Explore this fabulous resource for less toxic options at growsmartgrowsafe.org.

Learn more! Visit streamteam.info/native-plants to connect with even more resources.

Source: Stream Team News, Spring 2024