

Spring lawn and garden tips to protect water quality

Don't water the pavement! It won't grow! How do you know if you're watering the pavement? You need to observe your irrigation system in action. April is a good time to tune up your system. Run the system and check for leaks and sprinkler heads pointed in the wrong direction. Fix any problems. However, don't set the system to run automatically yet. If temperatures stay cool, or if we receive precipitation every week or two, you don't need to start regularly irrigating yet.

- Check your sprinklers several times during the season to make sure they are functioning properly and the direction of the spray has not shifted.
- Adjust the amount of time your automated sprinkler system runs as the weather cools or warms. Turn off the system if your landscape received enough water from rainfall that day. Don't water in the middle of a rainstorm!
- Conduct a soil test. Send a sample of your

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soil to a commercial laboratory. They'll tell you what you need to know about your soil, including its texture, its pH and nutrient levels, and more. The lab will also make fertilization recommendations.

- If nutrient levels are sufficient, you don't need to add fertilizer.
- Core aerate your lawn. The lawn should be moist but not wet. Don't aerate immediately after a rainstorm or irrigation cycle, as compaction could occur. After aerating, you can top-dress using high-quality compost. The compost will fall into the holes and help enrich the soil, improving soil structure and water-holding capacity. Core aerating is not thatching. Thatching is only needed when there is more than one-quarter inch of thatch layer. Too much

thatch will reduce water penetration and may increase runoff.

- When designing your landscape, limit the use of grass areas and use plants that have low requirements for water, fertilizers and pesticides. Avoid planting lawn within 3 feet to 4 feet of tree trunks.
- Minimize impervious surfaces, surfaces that won't absorb water, by installing wood decking, bricks or interlocking stones instead of impermeable cement. Permeable surfaces, surfaces through which water can penetrate, decrease runoff.
- Create a landscape buffer, a planted area between lawns and impervious surfaces. This will help minimize runoff and create a buffer to compensate for wind drift during watering.
- Use landscaping techniques such as grassy swales (low areas in the lawn), porous (permeable) walkways or French drains to increase infiltration and decrease runoff from your property.
- Reduce storm-water runoff from your site





Photos courtesy of University of Nevada Cooperative Extension.

by redirecting rain gutters onto vegetated or mulched areas, rather than bare soil or pavement. Your plants will benefit from the extra water, and you'll avoid polluted runoff.

- Disperse runoff by grading all impervious surfaces, including driveways and walkways, so that they drain onto vegetated areas. If driveways are already in place, infiltration trenches may be installed to capture runoff from driveways and allow it to infiltrate into the ground.
- Leave lawn clippings on your lawn so that nutrients in the clippings are recycled. This will reduce the amount of fertilizers you

need to apply. It will also reduce yard waste that ends up in landfills.

- Restore bare patches in your lawn as soon as possible. Spread mulch on bare ground to avoid erosion.
- Another way to reduce waste is to compost your yard trimmings. Compost is a valuable soil conditioner that gradually releases nutrients to your lawn and garden. Compost also helps retain moisture in the soil, helping you conserve water.
- Litter, leaves, sediment and other debris can clog storm drain systems and result in flooding. To prevent this, keep street gutters and storm drains free of these materials. Although major municipalities are responsible for maintaining storm drain inlets, there are too many inlets to allow frequent maintenance. You can help by checking the street gutters surrounding your property frequently and keeping them free of debris. Never dump lawn trimmings into storm drains, gutters, ditches or creeks.
- When plants decompose, nutrients are released and oxygen is consumed. This has a detrimental effect on water quality. Sweeping up leaves and yard trimmings from impervious surfaces and disposing of them properly or composting them will prevent nutrients from being delivered to streams and rivers via the storm drain system.
- If you live adjacent to streams, wetlands or other water bodies, allow thick vegetation to establish on the stream banks. This buffer acts to slow runoff and remove some pollutants before they enter the stream. **N**

For more information on core aerating, creating landscape buffers, composting, or other lawn and landscape techniques, contact University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, (775) 784-4848.

