

Lawn & Shrub Care

You might have noticed that, in addition to the yellowing of your lawn, there are a significant number of dead grass blades, especially in the high traffic areas. To remove the dead grass, start by mowing your lawn at a lower cutting height than you would normally use. Make sure your lawn is not wet for better results. The mowing action itself will pick up a lot of the dead material. However, to get what the mower has left behind and to pick up the dead blades the mower has skipped over, lightly rake the lawn with a leaf (fan) rake.

Shrubs also need attention to bring them back to life and to promote new growth. Start by removing all the dead leaves. Next, check the health of the branches by running your fingernail or knife gently down the stem. If you see a greenish color, you have a living stem. If there is no life in the stem, keep working your way down the branch until you reach living plant material. Remove dead branches and stems with a pair of sharp pruning shears, making a 45° downward cut. In some cases, it may be necessary to remove up to one third of the shrub if it needs rejuvenation, cutting off the oldest and weakest branches first.



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Spring Tune Up

Spring is the perfect time to tune up your sprinkler system and prepare your lawn for summer. The following tips should help to keep your landscaping looking good and also save on watering costs.

Warmer weather is back, so it is time to reset our irrigation controllers. Each station should be set to water in multiple cycles of 4 to 5 minutes' maximum to allow the water to soak into the soil without running off. Repeat the cycle as needed with a minimum of 45 minutes between cycles. This can be accomplished by using the controller's A, B, and C program settings. Increase watering days as temperatures get warmer to meet your turf or landscape watering needs.

Sprinkler efficiency is important and becomes more critical during the hot, dry summer months. Sprinkler nozzles wear out with time, and also get out of adjustment due to mowing and foot traffic. Check for proper coverage and adequate sprinkler height and adjust accordingly before temperatures start to climb. And don't forget to check your drip system 'Y' filter for accumulated debris, or in the event the filter needs replacing.

Your lawn will bounce back from winter dormancy if you fertilized in late fall. It is now ready for another application to keep your lawn looking healthy. A 'weed and feed' fertilizer is typically applied at this time.

Spring is also a good time to aerify your lawn. A healthy root system contributes to your lawn's appearance. Aerification pulls plugs out the soil and thatch layer, allowing oxygen and water to penetrate through to the turf's root system. This enables you to water less while getting the same result.

It is also time to raise your mower cutting height. An increase to 3" or 3 ½" height is recommended as we enter warmer months. This will allow the turf to retain more moisture, thus reducing watering. Check to make sure the increased mowing height does not interfere with sprinkler efficiency.



SMART CONTROLLERS

Smart controllers automatically adjust watering schedules and run-times in response to changes in the weather and environment, including conditions such as temperature, wind, humidity, and precipitation. Ultimately, their goal is to deliver the right amount of water to the plant when it needs it.

There are two basic types of smart controllers, sensor-based and weather-based:

- ☁ Sensor-based controllers receive information from soil probes and adjust the system settings per the soil moisture content.
- ☁ Weather-based controllers receive daily evapotranspiration (ET – water evaporation and plant transpiration) data from a remote weather station, telling the controller how much water is needed to make up for the previous day's water loss.

Water savings using a smart controller system averages about 25%. Technology continues to evolve in the irrigation field and we are seeing additional options such as drip irrigation systems to adjustable rotary nozzles.

Ongoing maintenance, managing water pressure along with smart controller options can greatly improve water management and increase your irrigation efficiency.

Storm Water Pollutants

Controlling what goes into the storm drain system is an important part in protecting wildlife and the environment. Storm drains come in all shapes and sizes, most which capture rain water that is running down the gutter. Unlike sanitary sewers, storm drain water is not treated and enters our river systems, which eventually discharges into the ocean - thus, underscoring the importance of managing storm drainage water quality.

Storm runoff sources include residential neighborhoods, commercial and industrial parking lots, and unimproved vacant land. Water running from these sources picks up various forms of pollutants, such as petroleum byproducts (motor oil, gasoline), trash, pesticides, fertilizers, and heavy metals. Soil fines and sand also work their way into the storm drain, which can restrict flow and reduce system efficiency.

So, what can we, as homeowners, do? For starters, we can reduce, if not eliminate, the amount of fertilizer, grass clippings, and loose soil that enter the storm drain system by applying best management practices (BMP).

Lightly watering your lawn after applying fertilizer can aid in moving the material down into the lower layers of the grass, where it will break down and become more beneficial to the turf. It also helps to prevent the chemicals from running onto the sidewalk and into the gutter during subsequent watering.

Grass clippings and leaves entering the storm drain add organic solids into the system, which can restrict the flow or cause a bacterial overload.



Excess bacteria can result in odor problems and algae build up along neighborhood creeks and drainage ways. Although leaf droppings naturally occur, it is best to reduce the number of contaminants, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, by gathering and removing leaves and grass clippings.

Loose soil can also be managed through containment. You can often see sand bags and silt fencing placed around the perimeter of construction sites. Homeowners can apply this method on a smaller scale to help mitigate unnecessary contaminant runoff. Accumulation of silt and sand in the storm drain system and along creek beds and water ways reduces system efficiency and can negatively impact wildlife.

Doing your part can help reduce the negative impact on wildlife and the environment.

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