



Save Money with Soil Testing to Improve Your Lawn

Caring for the environment also means caring for your lawn. By using proper mowing and maintenance practices, you can enjoy a healthy, beautiful lawn while protecting local streams, rivers and lakes.

Our homes contain impervious surfaces (rooftop, patio, and driveway) that can't absorb and filter rainfall. This adds more runoff to your lawn and the underlying soil characteristics of the lawn can affect how well the lawn absorbs and filter the impervious runoff. Soil compaction, low pH (e.g. acidic soils) and low nutrients can impact how well your lawn grows in your lawn. If these issues are not addressed, excess fertilizer will not improve your lawn and is not retained in the landscape. It can contribute to harmful algal blooms and other water quality problems.

Beyond that, what is lawn care? It's not just seeding, watering and mowing. Aerating and amending the soil also improves soil structure, drainage and nutrient uptake. Balancing the soil pH so fertilizers are useful is always your best option. Managing clippings and leaves are all part of lawn care too. Returning these improve the soil and vegetation. How we care for our lawn determines the degree of the environmental benefits and impacts we achieve.

Healthy lawns can help prevent erosion, reduce runoff, and filter rainwater. A healthy lawn has uniform and mature vegetation that inhibits erosion and retains nutrients. A healthy lawn can capture over an inch of rain; traps dust and dirt; convert carbon dioxide to oxygen; and reduces the heat island effect with air temperatures up to 30 degrees cooler than pavement. A sparse lawn with bare soil needs improvement either by amending the soil or selecting different landscape plants.

The soil should be tested every three years. A composite soil sample of the whole yard is collected. A soil test includes information on the amount of nutrients, organic matter and pH level. The proper balance is essential to a healthy lawn. Additional assessments of patchy bare spots could be done to verify foot traffic, recent disturbance, disease or standing water.

The Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District is working with your local Extension agent to make sure homeowners like yourself have the knowledge and resources to do your part. The District is offering a voucher to cover the cost of the soil test. The results come with specific recommendations that we help you to understand. For these vouchers please contact the District at 540-825-8591 or stephanieD@culpeperswcd.org.

For more information on lawn care see the Virginia Extension Publication list:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/tags.resource.html?tag=pubs_ext_vt_edu:lawns .