

5 Five steps to... Natural Yard Care

Why go natural?

Our yards are great spaces for relaxing. But in taking care of them, we often use water inefficiently, produce a lot of waste and overuse chemicals that are bad for the environment and our families' health.

The good news is that by making some simple changes we can:

- Save money
- Save time
- Protect the environment
- Protect our families' health
- Make a healthy, beautiful yard without working too hard!



1 Build healthy soil with compost and mulch

Soil is alive, and soil life matters. A teaspoonful of soil contains about 4 billion organisms!

They keep soil loose, recycle nutrients for plants, help store water and protect plants from disease.

- Feed your soil with compost. Dig 1-4 inches of compost into beds when planting.
- Make compost at home, or buy it in bags or bulk.
- Mulch it! Spread 1-3 inches of compost, leaves, grass, bark, wood chips - or the City of Tacoma's TAGRO Mulch - to conserve water, prevent weeds, and feed the soil.
- Need fertilizer? Go organic! Organic fertilizers feed plants longer and are less likely to wash off into our streams.

Remember, healthy plants grow in healthy soil.

2 Plant right for your site

Get to know your yard. Where is it sunny or shady? Is the soil dry or soggy? Then choose the right plant for the right place. Select plants that grow well in the Northwest and in the conditions in your yard.

- Pick plants that resist pests and use less water.
- Group plants by their needs for water, sun and soil.
- Lawns and vegetables are picky. They'll only grow in sunny, well drained, level sites.
- Give plants a good start by preparing the soil with compost.
- Make space for wildlife by using trees and native plants.



3 Practice smart watering

Many plant problems are caused by overwatering. Save money on water bills and grow healthier plants by watering deeply, but infrequently.

- Moisten the whole root zone, then let the soil dry before watering again.
- Make every drop count by mulching, selecting drought-tolerant plants, using soaker hoses and water timers and watering only in the early morning or evening to reduce evaporation.
- Use automatic irrigation systems efficiently. Have a pro test and adjust annually. Check for leaks every month. Don't water if it's rained recently.
- Let the rain soak in. Direct downspouts out into lawns or garden beds. Use open pavers. Help soil absorb rainfall by building rain gardens or using compost and mulch.



The City of Tacoma's all natural TAGRO soil products are good choices for earth-friendly gardening practices.

4

Think twice before using pesticides

Scientists have found 23 pesticides (weed and bug killers) in our local streams. Overuse of these products is bad for the soil, bad for fish, and bad for our families' health.



- Start with prevention. Select disease-resistant plants, and pull weeds by hand before they spread.
- Identify the problem before you spray, squash or stomp. Most bugs are good bugs!
- Accept a little damage – give natural predators time to control pests.
- Select the least toxic control method. Many less toxic products are now available.
- Replace problem plants with more pest-resistant ones.
- Only use pesticides as the last resort. Pesticides can seep down into the groundwater that supplies our local wells with drinking water.

5

Practice natural lawn care

It's easy to put all these steps to work in our lawns, where we often use the most chemicals and water, produce the most waste and work too hard!

- Mow higher (1-2 inches) and leave the clippings. "Grasscycling" doesn't cause thatch, and it makes lawns healthier and provides free fertilizer!
- Add nutrients to your soil or fertilize moderately in May and September with a "natural organic" or "slow release" fertilizer, such as SoundGRO.
- Water deeply, to moisten the whole root zone, but infrequently.
- To repair damaged lawns or to keep lawns healthy during water shortages spread ¼ inch of TAGRO Mix over the top, then reseed.
- Think twice before using "weed and feed" or other pesticides. Long-handled weed pullers pop weeds out easily.
- Consider alternatives to lawns for steep slopes, shady areas or near streams and lakes.



Want to know more?



Resources

- **TAGRO soil products:** www.tagro.com, (253) 502-2150
- **SoundGRO fertilizer:** www.soundgro.com, (253) 798-3099
- **Composting:** www.cityoftacoma.org/composting
- **Natural lawn & garden care:** www.cityoftacoma.org/naturalyards
- **Water conservation, indoors and outdoors:** www.tacomawater.com, (253) 502-8723
- **Washington State University Master Gardener information:** <http://gardening.wsu.edu>, (253) 798-7170
- **Yard and garden chemical disposal:** www.cityoftacoma.org/hazwaste, (253) 591-5418
- **Choosing the right plant for the right place:** www.greatplantpicks.org, www.dnr.metrokc.gov/gonative
- **Native plant information:** <http://gardening.wsu.edu/nwnative> or www.wnps.org
- **Local nurseries and garden centers**
- **Natural landscape exhibit: EnviroHouse (Tacoma Landfill),** www.cityoftacoma.org/envirohouse, (253) 573-2426

When it comes to your yard, act naturally!

Thanks to King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks and Seattle Public Utilities for providing content and for permission to reprint. Thanks to Washington State Department of Ecology for funding this publication.



Solid Waste Management
Surface Water Management
Wastewater Management



For more information, contact Geoff Rinehart, Natural Yard Care Program, at (253) 798-4587.