

## What is natural yard care?

Natural yard care includes using natural fertilizers like compost and mulch to improve your soil, selecting the right plants for the conditions in your yard, watering wisely, using fewer pesticides or eliminating pesticide use altogether, and implementing natural lawn maintenance techniques. By working with nature to maintain your yard, you can have a great looking landscape that's easier to care for and healthier for families, pets, wildlife, and our environment.



## What benefits does natural yard care provide?

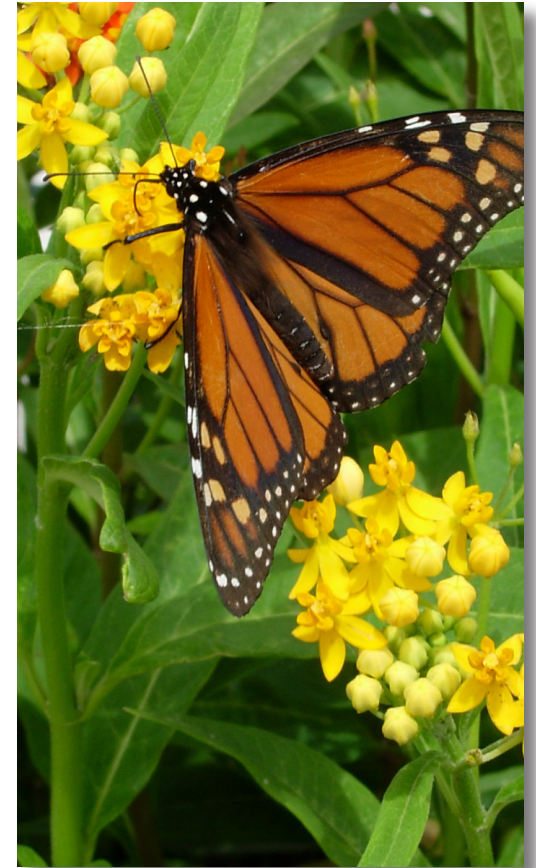
- Saves you money on water, pesticides and fertilizers.
- Protects your family's health by reducing contact with pesticides and fertilizers.
- Prevents excess pesticides and fertilizers from ending up in nearby streams and Lake Washington.
- Conserves water supply, leaving more in nearby streams for salmon and other fish.



## Helpful Resources

- Mercer Island Low Impact Development Information: <http://bit.ly/MI-LID>
- King County – Northwest Natural Yard and Garden Information: <http://bit.ly/KC-NWyardcare>
- King County, Seattle Public Utilities, and Saving Water Partnership – Natural Yard Care Guide: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf>
- King County and Seattle Public Utilities – Natural Lawn Care Guide: <http://www.savingwater.org/docs/natlawncafe.pdf>
- Saving Water Partnership – Natural Lawn and Garden Care Guides: <http://www.savingwater.org/outside.htm>
- King County and Portland Metro – Grow Smart, Grow Safe: A Consumer Guide to Lawn and Garden Products: <http://bit.ly/KC-toxics>
- City of Bellevue Waterwise Garden (PDF): <http://bit.ly/Bellevue-Waterwise>

# Natural Yard Care



Caring for your yard naturally



# Steps to Natural Yard Care

Refer to the **Natural Yard Care Guide** and the **Natural Lawn Care Guide** (see links in Helpful Resources section of this brochure) for detailed information on natural yard care techniques. These guides recommend the following steps:

## Build healthy soil

- Use compost when planting new beds or lawns.
- Make your own compost at home using leaves, flowers, and grass.
- Use mulch in the spring or fall in your flower beds and vegetable gardens; around trees, shrubs, and woody perennials; and on your lawn.
- Purchase and use “natural organic” or “slow release” fertilizers at the rate recommended by the manufacturer.

## Plant right for your site

- Select and group plants for the sun, soil, and water conditions in your yard.
- Use native plants whenever possible.
- Select plants that are pest resistant and do not require much water.
- Limit lawn areas.

## Practice smart watering

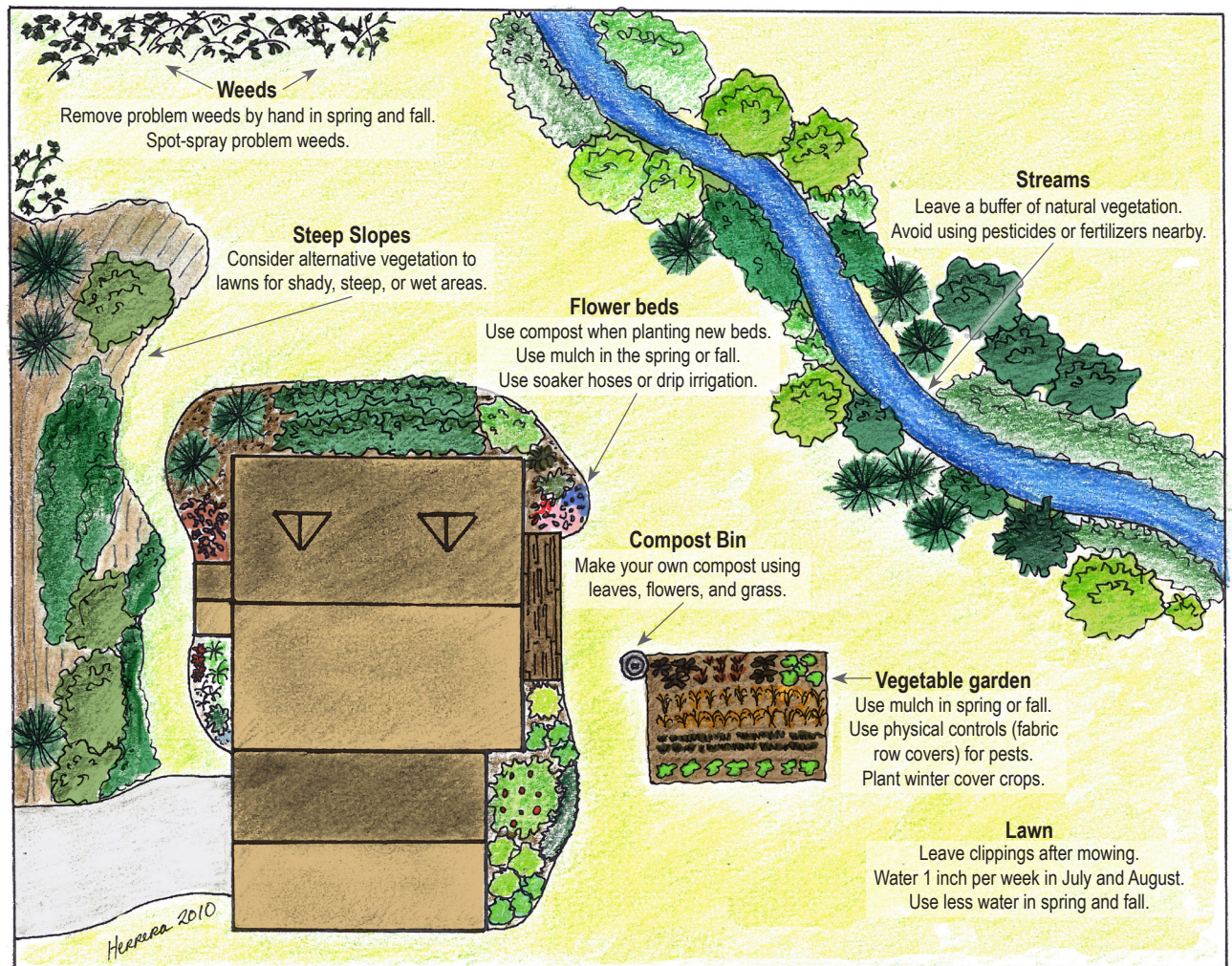
- Water deeply, but infrequently.
- Moisten the whole root zone.
- Use soaker hoses, drip irrigation, or a timer that connects to your faucet.
- Use automatic irrigation systems efficiently.

## Think twice about using pesticides

- Identify the problem before you spray, squash, or stomp.
- Accept a little damage; give nature time to work.
- Use the least toxic solution to a pest or weed problem.
- Use chemical pesticides as the last resort and spot apply it.
- Replace problem plants with pest-resistant ones.

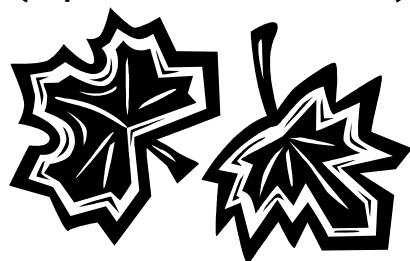
## Maintain your lawn naturally

- Mow high, mow often, and leave the clippings.
- Fertilize moderately in September and May with a natural organic or “slow-release” fertilizer.
- Water deeply (and less frequently) to moisten the root zone.
- Improve poor lawns with aeration and overseeding.
- Think twice before using pesticides or weed-and-feed.
- Consider alternatives to lawns for steep slopes, shady areas, or near streams and lakes.



## Fall Natural Yard Care Tips

(September - November)



### Flower Beds and Vegetable Gardens

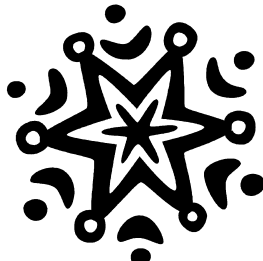
- Pull emerging weeds in beds when ground is moist and before they develop deep roots.
- Mulch garden beds with leaves or compost to reduce winter weeds and feed the soil or plant winter cover crops in open beds.
- Prepare new planting areas by digging in compost.

### Tree and Shrub Beds

- Mulch tree and shrub beds with leaves, wood chips, or bark.
- Plant trees, shrubs, and many perennials in early fall to give them a good start.

## Winter Natural Yard Care Tips

(December - February)



### Flower Beds and Vegetable Gardens

- Rake winter leaf mulch back onto beds if winds blow it off.
- Weed beds once during winter to prevent weeds going to seed.

### Tree and Shrub Beds

- Prune fruit trees and other woody trees and shrubs while they're dormant (December-February).

### Start Planning for Spring

- Tune up yard equipment; sharpen mower blades.
- Plan drip irrigation or soaker hoses for beds and containers to conserve water.

## Spring Natural Yard Care Tips

(March - May)



### Flower Beds and Vegetable Gardens

- Prepare new planting beds and gardens by mixing in 1-3 inches of compost.
- Pull weeds when they first start growing, while soil is moist and roots are short, before they go to seed.
- Buy plants that resist disease and use less water.
- Pest problems? Call the Garden Hotline at (206) 633-0224 or e-mail them using the following link: [www.gardenhotline.org/question](http://www.gardenhotline.org/question)

### Tree and Shrub Beds

- Prepare new tree and shrub beds by mixing compost into the entire bed (not just planting holes) or plant trees in native soil and mulch well.

### Lawns

- Improve thin areas of lawns in September – October by aerating, overseeding, and top-dressing with compost.
- Fertilize lawns with “natural organic” or “slow release” fertilizer in September.
- Plant new lawns September 1 – October 15, to give them the best start before next summer.

#### Watering

- Reduce watering for cooler weather in September.
- When rains come, shut off and drain watering systems.
- Put away exposed soaker hoses, or re-cover with mulch if left out.

#### Composting

- Clear out annual garden growth and compost it for spring. Keep pile as moist as a wrung-out sponge.

Source: Saving Water Partnership  
Natural Yard Care Guide:  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf)  
**Start Planning for Spring**

- Check storage areas for unwanted chemicals, and dispose safely. Call the King County Household Hazards Line at (206) 296-4692, toll free at 1-888-869-4233, or e-mail [haz.waste@kingcounty.gov](mailto:haz.waste@kingcounty.gov) for information about disposal options.
- Plan to replace plants that have disease or pest problems.
- Call the Garden Hotline at (206) 633-0224 (Monday through Saturday from 9 am to 5 pm) to ask questions and request free brochures to start planning for spring. You can also send them an e-mail using the following link:  
[www.gardenhotline.org/question](http://www.gardenhotline.org/question)



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#### Lawns

- Mow about 2 inches high for most lawns (1 inch for bentgrass lawns) and leave the clippings.
- For lawns in poor condition: aerate, overseed, and top-dress with 1/2-inch of compost.
- Fertilize lawns if needed in May with “natural organic” or “slow release” fertilizer.

#### Watering

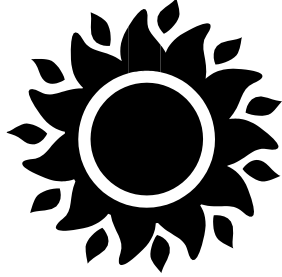
- Prepare sprinkler systems by testing, adjusting, and repairing leaks.
- Lay out soaker hoses in beds, and cover with mulch.
- Check soil moisture at plant roots before watering – don’t water until they need it.

#### Composting

- Harvest compost from your bin. Throw any uncomposted sticks or stalks back in for another cycle.

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Natural Yard Care Guide:  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf)

# Summer Natural Yard Care Tips (June - August)



## Flower Beds and Vegetable Gardens

- Mulch flower and vegetable beds with compost or grass clippings to conserve water and control weeds.
- Use fabric row covers to keep pests off sensitive vegetables.
- Identify bugs before you spray, squash, or stomp – they may be “good bugs” that eat pests.

## Tree and Shrub Beds

- Mulch shrub and tree beds with wood chips, leaves, or bark once a year to conserve water, reduce weeds, and feed the soil.

### **Lawns**

- Mow regularly, and leave the clippings on the lawn.
- Keep mower blades sharp to reduce lawn damage and brown tips.
- Consider saving water by letting some lawn areas go brown and dormant until fall.

### **Watering**

- Start and re-check watering systems, and adjust for weather. (Don't water when it rains.)
- Water lawns 1 inch per week or let go brown and dormant. Water enough to moisten root zone once a month.
- Water at dawn or in evening to reduce evaporation.

### **Composting**

- Add yard debris to compost pile; water pile to keep it moist. Place pile in shade or cover.

Source: Saving Water Partnership  
Natural Yard Care Guide:  
[www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/pubs/0807064.pdf)

### **Lawns**