Gardening Gone Native

The weather in South Alabama is not meant for weak-hearted vegetation. Keep your gardens and lawns looking lustrous for longer by using the following plants, which are both low-maintenance and native to our hot, humid region.

Centipede Grass	Satsumas
Swamp Lilies	Okra
Smooth Azaleas	Peaches
Southern Magnolias	Blackberries
Honeysuckle	Tomatoes
American Holly	Pumpkins
Hardy Hibiscus	Sweet Potatoes
Crested Iris	Turnips
Helen's Flower	Onions
Pitcher Plants	Peas

For gardening calendars and planting guides, visit the Alabama Cooperative Extension System's website (www.aces.edu).

Alternatives to Pesticides

Many types of insects (such as lady beetles, lacewings, syrphid flies, parasitic mini-wasps, and spiders) are beneficial to your garden plants. These "good bugs" help decrease the need for insecticides, which could end up in waterways, by preying on insects that would cause harm to your garden. "Good bugs" can be attracted with plants from the aster, mint, mustard, and parsley plant families.

Additional information about pesticides, herbicides, and more can be found on the City of Mobile's storm water website (www.stormwatermobile.org).

Rain Gardens

A rain garden acts as a filter, helping to remove pollutants from storm water and allowing it to seep into the groundwater table. These gardens detract from flooding and stream erosion, and they work best when positioned in a natural depression between a runoff source (like a downspout or a driveway) and where the runoff exits your yard.

Plants like dogwoods, wisteria, swamp sunflowers, and sword ferns are well suited to facilitate a rain garden.

LAWN MAINTENANCE AND GARDENING

Storm Water Management

Educational Series

Basic Maintenance Practices

The quality of your lawn can be significantly impacted by basic maintenance practices, like mowing and fertilizing.

Recommended Mowing Heights

Turfgrass	Mowing Height (in.)	Mowing Frequency (days)	Mower Type
Bahaia	3 - 4	7 - 17	Rotary
Bermuda	1/2 - 1 1/2	3 - 5	Rotary or Reel*
Centipede	1 1/2 - 2	10 - 14	Rotary
St. Augustine	2 1/2 - 4	7 - 14	Rotary
Tall Fescue	2 - 3 1/2	7 - 14	Rotary
Zoysia	1 - 2	10 - 14	Rotary or Reel*

* Reel mowers provide a superior-quality cut.

Soil Testing

The key to successful fertilization is to have an annual plan. The basis of this plan should be the nutritional status of your soil, which can be determined by soil tests typically performed by your local plant nursery for approximately $20 per sample. Samples should be collected from 2 - 3" down into the soil and can be easily stored and transported in a plastic gallon bag. Soil analyses test the pH of your soil, which is necessary to know when purchasing the correct type of fertilizer for your lawn. You should conduct a soil test every 2 - 3 years to ensure that proper nutrient levels are being maintained.

Fertilizing

Fertilizers contain large amounts of phosphorous and nitrogen, which can pollute storm water, groundwater, and runoff into lakes and streams if over applied.

Recommended Fertilization Schedule

Turfgrass	Desired Quality	Total Pounds of Nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per year
Bahia	Low High	2 4
Common Bermuda	Low High	2 4
Hybrid Bermuda	Low High	4 6
Centipede	Low High	1 2
St. Augustine	Low High	2 4
Tall Fescue	Low High	3 5
Zoysia	Low High	2 4

When to Water

The most efficient way to water a lawn is to do so when signs of drought stress are apparent, and the best time to water is in the **morning** to avoid loss by evaporation.

The color of your lawn is a good indicator of drought stress. **If grass turns from green to bluish-grey or white in color, or if your steps leave lasting footprints,** apply about 1/2 to 1 inch of water. This will soak into the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches, depending on the type of soil.

Avoid watering to the point of runoff! If necessary, apply water in stages so that it will soak into the soil.

Thatch Control

Thatch is a layer of living and dead grass plant parts between the surface of the soil and the green vegetation of the turfgrass. Many problems can be caused for your lawn by excessive thatch (more than 1 inch).

Over fertilizing, overwatering, mowing too infrequently, or mowing too high can contribute to the accumulation of thatch.

If necessary, thatch can be removed with various kinds of mechanical equipment (like core aerifiers or vertical mowers) or by using a hand rake. The best time of year to dethatch a lawn is when the turfgrass is actively growing.

Mulch Ado about Nothing

Of the 243 million tons of municipal trash Americans generate in a year, only a third is recycled or composted.

You can have an impact on decreasing the volume of trash in our landfills and add a benefit to your yard at the same time.

- Turn leaves into mulch for your outdoor plants and shrubs.
- Use your leaves for composting.
- Remember, when disposing of yard waste, bag it or blow it away from the street. Don't put it down storm drains!

Additional information about fertilizers, lawn maintenance, composting, and more can be found on the City of Mobile's storm water website (www.mobilestormwater.org).