Your yard is a great space to relax. But you might use water inefficiently, produce a lot of waste and overuse chemicals that are bad for the environment and your family’s health.

You can make simple changes to:

- Save time and money.
- Protect the environment and your family’s health.
- Make a beautiful yard without working too hard!

**1 Build healthy soil. Compost and mulch.**

Soil is alive. 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 you plant.
- Make compost at home, or buy it in bags or bulk.
- Mulch it! Spread 1-3 inches of compost, leaves, grass, bark or wood chips 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.

**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. Prepare the soil with compost.
- Make space for wildlife. Use trees and native plants.

**3 Practice smart watering.**

Too much water causes plant problems. Save money on your water bill and grow healthier plants. Water deeply, but infrequently.

- Moisten the whole root zone, then let the soil dry before you water again.
- Select drought-tolerant plants and use water timers. Water in the early morning or late evening to reduce evaporation.
- Use automatic irrigation systems efficiently. Have a professional test and adjust each year. Check for leaks every month. Don’t water if it has rained recently. Consider installing a smart irrigation controller to adjust water as needed.
- Let the rain soak in. Direct downspouts into garden beds. Use open pavers. Help soil absorb rainfall. Build rain gardens or use compost and mulch.
- Group plants with similar water needs. This makes it easier to give them only the amount of water they need.
- Lawns need only 1 inch of water (including rainfall) each week during the summer and less during April, May and September. Split this into two sessions per week.
4 Think twice before you use pesticides.

Scientists found 23 pesticides (weed and bug killers) in local streams. Overuse of these products is bad for the soil, fish and your family’s health.

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

5 Practice natural lawn care.

Take steps to reduce waste, chemicals, water and time to care for your lawn.

- Mow higher (1-2 inches) and leave 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.
- 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 you use 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?

- TAGRO soil products: www.tagro.com
- SoundGRO fertilizer: www.soundgro.com
- Composting: www.cityoftacoma.org/composting
- Natural lawn and garden care: www.tpchd.org/naturalyardcare
- Water conservation, indoors and outdoors: www.mytpu.org/watersmart
- Washington State University Master Gardener information: http://gardening.wsu.edu
- Yard and garden chemical disposal: www.cityoftacoma.org/hazwaste
- Choose the right plant for the right place: www.greatplantpicks.org www.kingcounty.gov/gonative
- Native plant information: www.wnps.org
- Natural landscape exhibit: EnviroHouse (Tacoma Recovery and Transfer Center) www.cityoftacoma.org/envirohouse
- Visit local nurseries and garden centers.