

Summary Report for South Sound Lawn Coaching Site Visits & Neighborhood Demonstrations

Site Visits with a Lawn Coach

Each participant in the program received one spring and one fall lawn site assessment by a professional lawn coach. During site visits, lawn coaches made recommendations using the soil test results, current lawn appearance and health. They took into account current lawn care practices and level of time and money the participant is willing to put into lawn care to develop a realistic lawn care recommendation. If conditions are unsuitable for lawn, coaches suggested alternative plantings or uses that are appropriate for the site conditions.

Recommendations included proper timing of product application and other practices, including time of month(s), weather, air temperature, soil temperature and other conditions. All of the recommended practices were reviewed in detail at the demonstration workshops, so information given on the site visit is basic.

During site visits lawn coaches reviewed key points regarding fertilizer and lime use, including (1) application rates as per the soil test recommendation, (2) “good housekeeping” with fertilizers – when to fertilize, preventing spills, keeping granules off the pavement, and how to safely store and proper disposal of fertilizers (these topics will be discussed in more detail at the demonstration workshop).

Site visits covered the following topics:

- Assess lawn and soil health and conditions, problems, and desires; along with feasibility of achieving desires based on conditions (easy things to do versus difficult or impossible things to do).
- Go over soil test results (see Attachment B for sample soil test analysis report) and fertilizer and lime recommended application based on the nutrient levels and pH.
- Review the products used and lawn care practices; discuss which products and practices are beneficial for lawn and soil health and which are not; including, but not limited to the list below:
- Mowing height: >2”, with 1/3 of blade removed per cutting
- Mulch mowing: encourage to return nutrients back to the soil
- Thatch, dethatching
- Soil compaction and lawn aeration
- Watering during the summer: weekly watering that is deep and infrequent
- Not watering during the summer: tips for preparing the lawn for summer dormancy
- Sharpen or replace lawn mower blade: for a clean cut
- Quick release versus slow release fertilizers, natural versus chemical fertilizers
- Improving soil health

Hands-on Neighborhood Demonstrations

Site visits are too brief to include instructions on how to do specific natural lawn care practices that are recommended. Two different “when-to and how-to” demonstration workshops were offered to support learning and behavior change. The spring/fall* activities demonstration workshop was 2 hours and the summer* activities workshop was 1 hour. The workshops showed how to use equipment, while discussing proper timing within a sequence of activities on the lawn. The lawn care activities were demonstrated on a small area of lawn showing how to use the equipment use and procedures and discuss tips, best management practices, and other “know-how” from the professionals.

Approximately 25 to 30 participants attended each workshop. The demonstrations were hands-on, led by the lawn coaches allowing participants to try out methods on the grass using equipment and products. The purpose of the demonstrations was to show how to improve lawn appearance and health with cultural practices that will in turn reduce the amount of fertilizer needed to maintain the lawn.

Spring neighborhood demonstrations were offered on Saturday, April 5 in unincorporated Thurston County and Saturday April 26, at City of Tumwater City Hall. There was a morning and afternoon session on both days.

Spring/fall* demonstration workshops showed how to and told when to:

- Determine the fertilizer application based on the N-P-K ratio, soil test recommendation, size of the lawn, and pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft.
- Calibrate a spreader with fertilizer and lime, show both drop and broadcast spreader calibration, and pros and cons of each type
- Apply fertilizer and lime
- Aerate, show how to operate equipment safely
- Top dress, show various ways to top dress to achieve a light topdressing with compost, topsoil or blended mix
- Overseed, selecting seed variety and spreading evenly
- In addition to these outside “stations”, there session began with a brief slide show explaining the local water quality problems in Puget Sound, how lawn care practices impact the health of Puget Sound, and how Natural lawn Care practices can help improve Puget Sound. Each participating household received their unique soil test results and the introductory talk explained the significance of the numbers.

Summer* demonstration workshops show how to and tell when to:

- Improve soil health
- Naturally deal with moss, insects, diseases, and other pests
- Water, using containers to verify time for containers to fill up 1 inch, then check root zone to ensure that 1 inch was adequate weekly watering to penetrate into the root zone.
- Prepare lawn for summer dormancy if not watering
- Change a mower blade, mowing, mulch mowing

* The Tumwater and Thurston County participant were only invited to the Spring demonstration. City of Olympia’s National Estuary Program participants were able to attend three demonstrations.

Date _____

Time In: _____ Time Out: _____

Participant Name: _____

Address: _____

Lawn Coach Assessment & Recommendation

What practices are you doing now?

Mowing

- How often? Regularly during season As needed When I have to
- Mulch Mowing Yes No
- Mow 2 inches or higher? Yes No
- Removing 1/3 of the grass each mowing? Yes No
- Replace/sharpen blade? Once per year or more Never

Fertilizing and Lime

- When was the last time you applied fertilizer? _____
- How many times per year do you normally fertilize? _____
- What product do you usually put down? _____
- How much product do you usually put down? _____
- When was the last time you applied lime? _____
- When was the last time you applied weed control? _____
- What product(s) did you use? _____

Watering

- Do you have a sprinkler system, or hand water? Sprinkler By hand
- Is your sprinkler system currently operational? Yes No
- How often do you typically water? _____
- When do you start watering? _____
- When do you finish watering? _____

Site and Lawn Appearance

- Soil depth 1-2 inches 2-3 inches 3-4 inches 4 inches
- Soil type Sand Clay Loam Fill/rock
- Soil compaction Average Compacted
- Shade & sunlight Full sun Moderate Shade Extreme shade
- Drainage Good Average Poor
- Reasons Soil depth Soil compaction Outside source
- Overall appearance of lawn Dense and healthy Thinning Worn areas
- Insect or disease present Yes No
- Weeds present Yes No Tolerable Not tolerable
- Moss present Yes No Tolerable Not tolerable

Notes and observations: _____

Recommendations

Mowing recommendations: _____

Fertilize, lime, weed control:

- Use >50% slow release type fertilizer
- Calculate what you need:
www.rutgersnjfertilizerapp.blogspot.com
- Lime – apply based on soil test
- Moss – apply iron as needed
- Use HazoHouse to get rid of chemicals: www.co.thurston.wa.us/solidwaste/hazardous/haz-hazohouse.htm
- Other recommendations: _____

- Weed control- use products on:
www.growsmartgrowsafe.org
- Always, always, always read the label
- Always sweep and clean up off of hard surfaces
- Have a soil test done periodically

Watering Recommendations:

- No more than 1 inch per week
 - Deep and infrequent watering encourages root growth and discourages weed growth
 - www.seattle.gov/util/EnvironmentConservation/MyLawnGarden/Smart_Watering/index.htm
 - Other recommendations: _____
- Morning time is best – limits evaporation and run off
 - Minimize overspray onto hard surfaces
 - Don't apply more than the soil can absorb

Site Recommendations:

- Aerate every 12-18 months
- Lawns need 4-6 inches of healthy soil to flourish and grow

Improve soil

Overseed

Improve drainage

Other recommendations

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