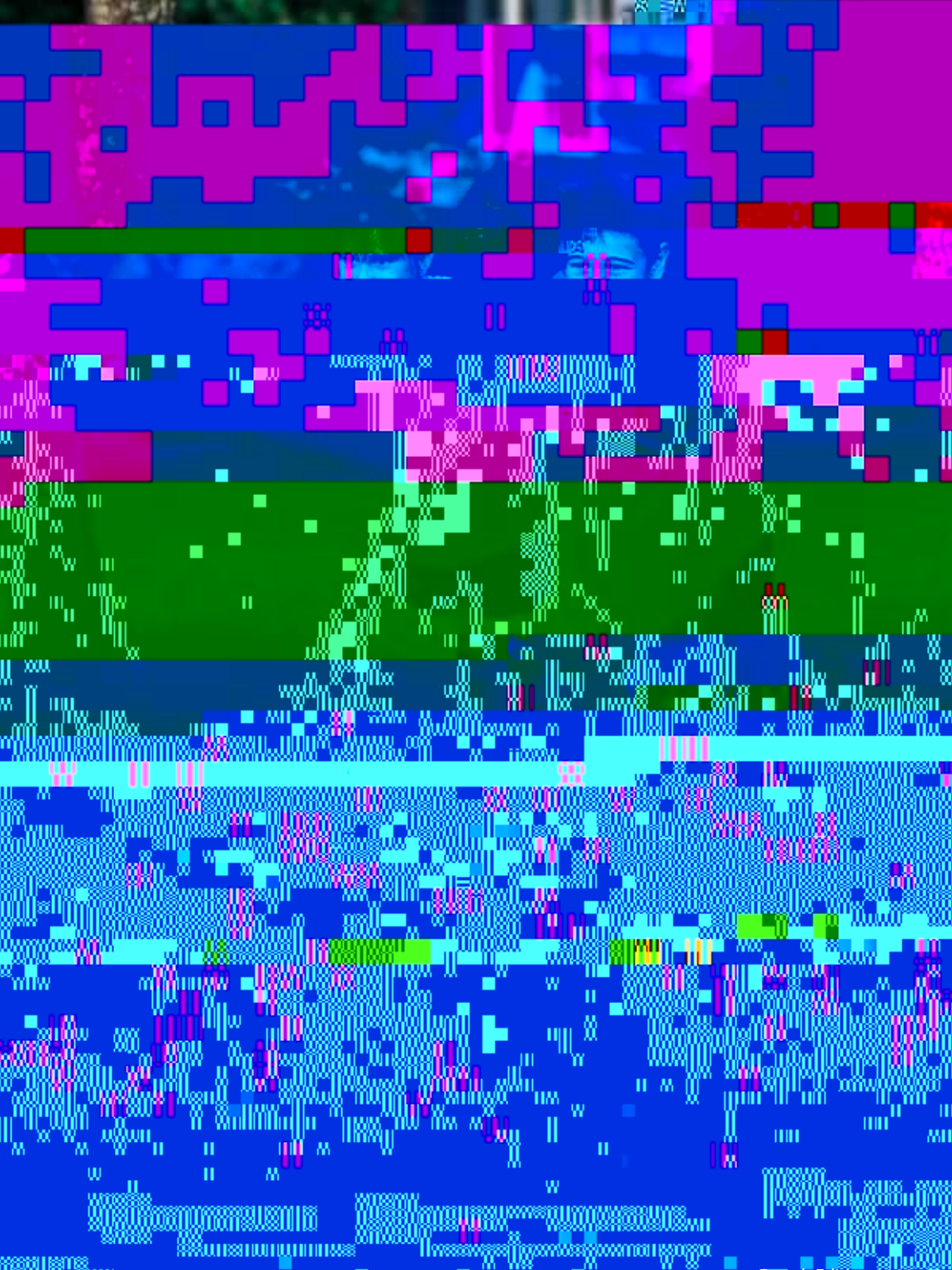


# Natural Yard Care

*Five steps to make your piece of the planet a healthier place to live.*





## Why go natural?

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

The good news is, by making some simple changes in how we care for our yards we can:

**Save Money** on water, waste disposal, and chemicals

**Save Time** – working with nature is easier, in the long run

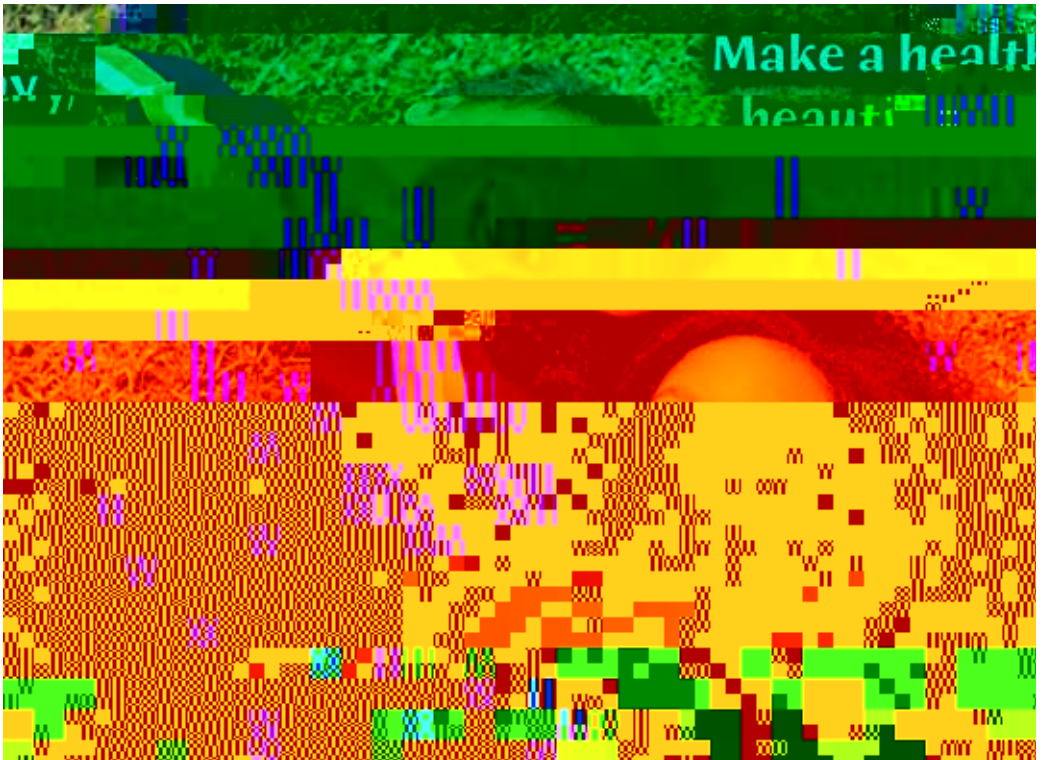
**Protect our families' health** by reducing contact with chemicals

### Protect the Environment

Conserve our precious water supplies, and leave more in rivers for salmon

Keep our streams and lakes clean by reducing the need for chemicals

Recycle yard trimmings into free fertilizer



# Put nature to work in your yard

Nature wastes nothing. In natural landscapes, soil life recycles dead plants into food for new plant growth. Plants are adapted to the water, sun, and soil available in their site. And the wide variety of plants, soil organisms, insects, and animals keeps most pests and diseases in check.

By working with nature in your yard, you can have a great looking landscape that's easier to care for and healthier for families, pets, wildlife, and our great Northwest environment.

## How? It's easy...

Start with these 5 steps:



**1 Build healthy soil**



**2 Plant right for your site**



**3 Practice smart watering**



**4 Think twice before using pesticides**



**5 Practice natural lawn care**







## Lawns and vegetables are picky!

They need several hours of full sun, level well-drained soil, and irrigation. Limit lawn areas to where you need them. Other plants are better for shade, soggy sites, or slopes, and require less maintenance.

## Give plants a good start.

Prepare the soil by mixing 20-25% compost into soil in planting beds. (For trees and shrubs, mix compost into the whole planting bed, or just plant in native soil and mulch well. Don't add compost just to their planting holes – that can limit root growth.) Then spread out the roots, add water, and tamp

## Make space for wildlife.

You can invite birds, butterflies, and other wildlife into your yard, protect shorelines and salmon, and make a more attractive landscape.

Plant trees and use \_\_\_\_\_, especially ones with fruit and flowers.

Avoid exotic plants – check the list of invasive “noxious weeds” at <http://dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/lands/weeds>

Plant in layers (ground cover, shrubs, and trees) so your landscape is like the forest.

Avoid using pesticides – they can poison birds, beneficial insects, and salmon when rain washes them through storm drains into streams.

Provide a bird bath or other small water source.

If space allows, leave dead standing trees and brush piles as homes for wildlife.

Leave wild “buffer” areas of native plants along ravines, streams, shoreline, and fencelines.







When soil is dry or compacted it won't absorb water quickly. If water puddles, stop watering a while and then restart, so the water has time to soak in.

Water in the early morning or evening – if you water at mid-day, half the water just evaporates.

## Use automatic irrigation systems efficiently.

Automatic systems can actually waste lots of water, or

*Water in early morning or evening to reduce evaporation.*

## Let the rain soak in.

Winter rain rushes off roofs, pavement, and compacted soil. This causes flooding downstream, erodes stream banks, and muddies the water, which harms salmon and other wildlife. You can help slow this winter runoff, and help the soil hold the moisture plants need in summer.

- Direct downspouts out into lawns and beds, or “dry wells.”
- Use compost and mulch to reduce erosion and help rain soak in.
- Use open pavers, gravel, or other pavement options that let rain through into the soil.
- Plant dense strips of native trees, shrubs, and groundcovers next to streams, lakes, and ditches to stabilize the soil, and to slow and filter runoff.



## 4 Think twice before using pesticides



## **If a pest or weed problem develops, use the least toxic solution.**

Physical controls like traps, barriers, fabric row covers, or repellants may work for pests.

Long handled weed pullers pop dandelions out easily.

Mulching once a year reduces weeds in beds.

Less toxic products like soaps, horticultural oils, and plant-based insecticides that work for many problems are now available.

Beneficial insects that prey on problem bugs are available for sale, or you can attract these “good bugs” by planting a variety of plants that provide pollen and nectar all year.

*Long handled weed pullers pop dandelions out easily.*

## **Use chemical pesticides as the last resort.**

If you must use a chemical pesticide, use the least toxic product, and spot apply it – don’t spread it all over the yard to kill a few weeds or bugs.

It may be best to have a professional who has all the protective gear do the application, but don’t use services that spread chemicals over the whole yard or spray on a calendar schedule. You want to apply pesticides only when and where you really

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# 5



## How much is one inch of water a week?

Scatter tuna cans or other straight-sided containers on your lawn, turn on the sprinkler, and check the time. When most cans have 1 inch of water in them, turn off the sprinkler and check how long it ran. Now you know how long to run your sprinkler each week in summer, if you want to keep your lawn green.



## Improve poor lawns with aeration, overseeding, and top-dressing with compost.

- Aerate in spring or fall to improve root development and water penetration.
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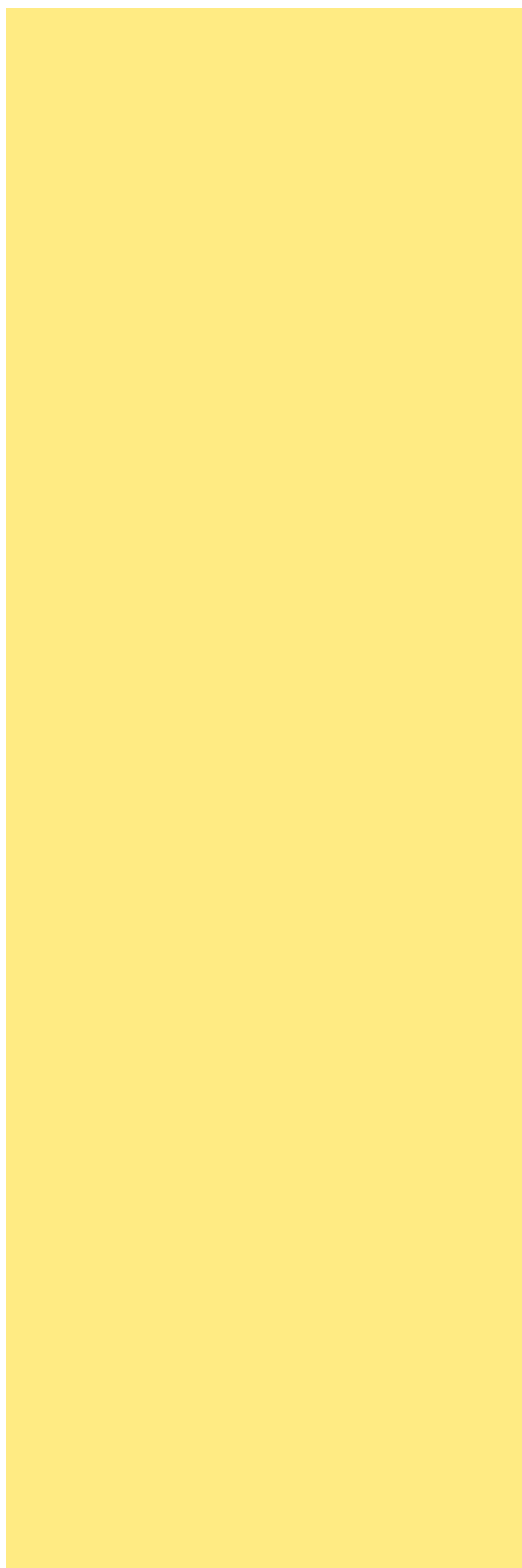
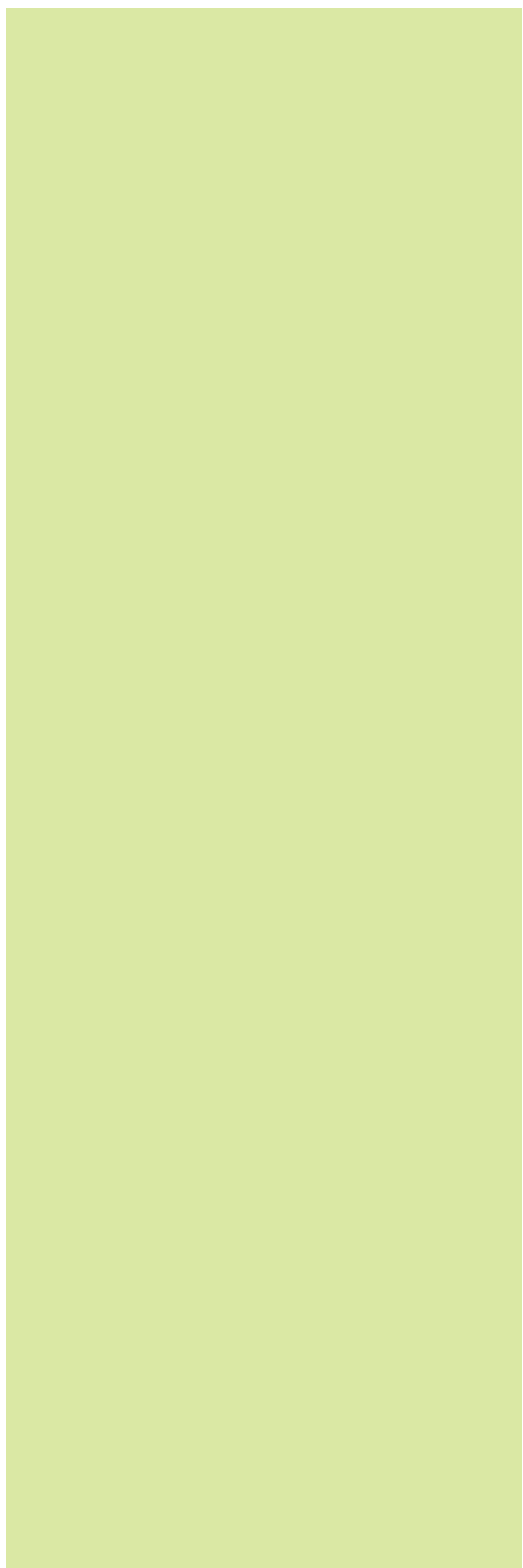
*You can rent an aerator, or get a yard service to aerate for you.*

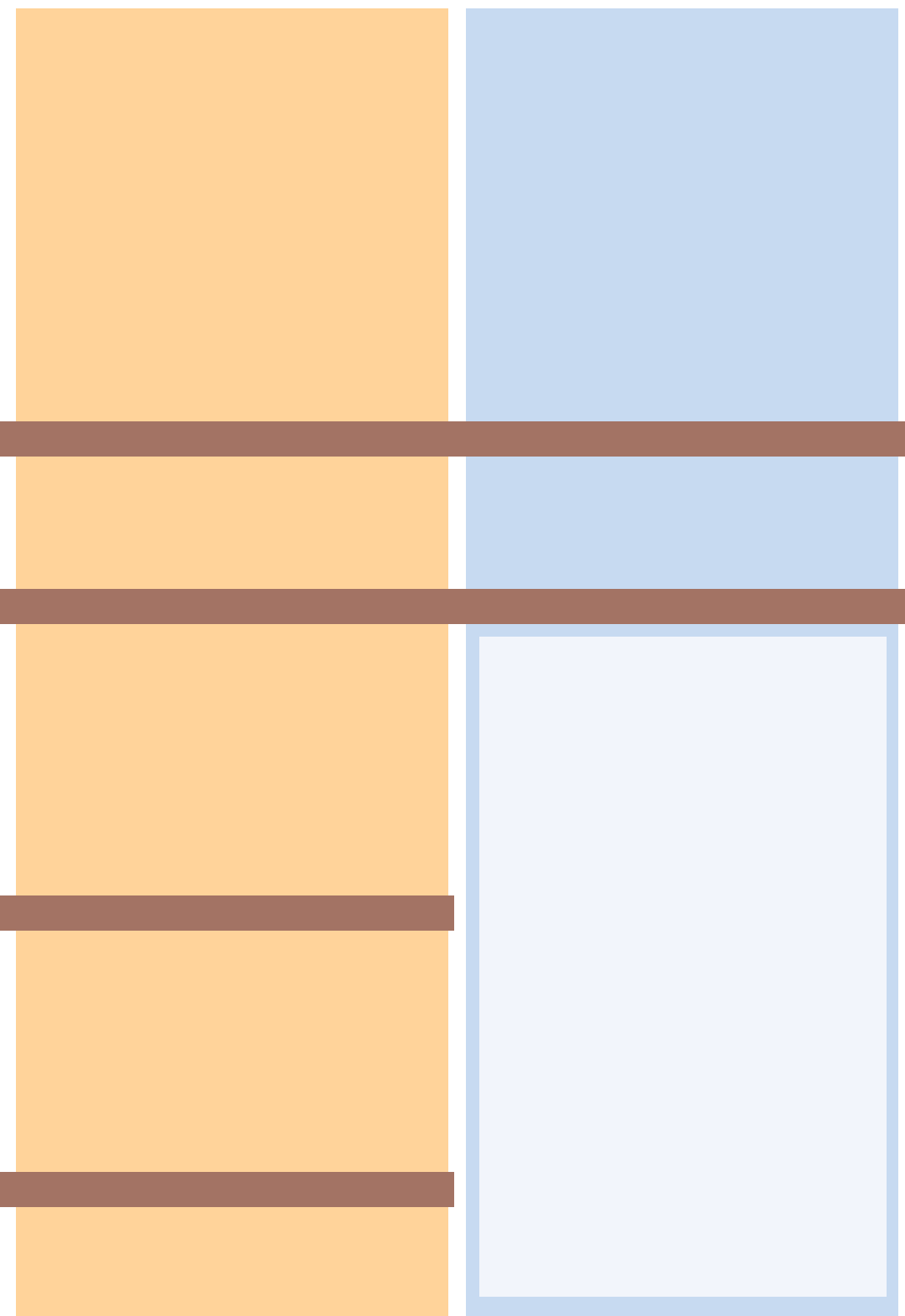
### **Honey I shrunk the lawn!**

Consider alternatives to lawns on steep slopes, shady areas, or near streams and lakes. Grass grows best on level, well-drained soil in full sun or part shade. And it takes a lot of work (and sometimes chemicals) to maintain. Look for other plants better suited to soggy soil, slopes, or heavy shade. Try to leave or plant a "buffer" of dense native vegetation along streams and lakes. It will filter and slow runoff, shade and cool the water, provide homes for wildlife, and prevent bank erosion too.

**For more information:** What about moss, or craneflies? Where to buy organic fertilizer or mulching lawnmowers? Ask the experts at the **Garden Hotline, 206-633-0224** or see resources on back cover.







## Questions?

Call the [206-633-0224](tel:2066330224), or email [help@gardenhotline.org](mailto:help@gardenhotline.org).

## Resources

- Soil and composting (*King County*)  
[www.kingcounty.gov/soils](http://www.kingcounty.gov/soils)
- Yard and garden topics (*King County*)  
<http://dnr.metrokc.gov/topics/yard-and-garden>
- Natural lawn & garden care (*City of Seattle*)  
[www.seattle.gov/util/services/yard](http://www.seattle.gov/util/services/yard)
- Water conservation, indoors and outdoors  
(*Saving Water Partnership*) [www.savingwater.org](http://www.savingwater.org)
- Washington State University  
Master Gardener information 206-296-3440  
<http://gardening.wsu.edu>

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