

## LAWN CARE - DO YOU WANT TO SAVE TIME AND MONEY?

Rethinking yard care can save you time and money. Many sources of urban water pollution originate right at home. For some, yard care can be a very rewarding pastime; for others, it is merely a chore necessary to protect the investment in a property's appearance. Regardless of motivation, most homeowners rely, at one time or another, on lawn and garden pesticides and fertilizers. Unfortunately, routine use of these chemicals threatens our environment and has unintended environmental consequences. Following some common-sense guidelines, however, will bring about healthy lawns and gardens and minimize environmental problems.



### Fertilizers:

Excessively or improperly applied fertilizers and pesticides can wash into storm drains and ditches. These chemicals then travel to lakes and streams. Clearly, there is a need to rethink what we're doing at home if urban waters are to be clean and usable.

- Healthy lawns, trees, and shrubs add to the beauty and value of a home. They also keep our lakes and streams clean by allowing rainwater to filter into the soil rather than running into storm sewers. Maintaining healthy lawns and landscape plants, however, often requires the use of fertilizers and improper fertilizer use can cause water pollution.
- Fertilizers, leaves, and grass clippings contain nitrogen and phosphorus. When these nutrients wash into lakes and streams, they promote unsightly algae blooms and lower dissolved oxygen levels in the water.
- Fertilizer carelessly applied on a lawn can be a waste of the homeowner's money. On hundreds or thousands of lawns, careless over-application creates problems for local streams and lakes.
- The label on a fertilizer bag has three numbers indicating the percentage (by weight) of the three nutrients most essential to healthy lawns. Nitrogen (N) is always listed first, followed by phosphate (P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>), which supplies phosphorus, and potash (K<sub>2</sub>O), which supplies potassium. Therefore, a 25 lb. bag of 25-4-5 fertilizer contains 25% (6.25 lbs.) nitrogen, 4% (1 lb.) phosphate, and 5% (1.24 lbs.) potash. The remainder is made of ingredients such as sand or ground limestone.

But, did you know that beginning **April 1, 2010**, fertilizer that is labeled as containing phosphorus or available phosphate cannot be applied to lawns or turf in Wisconsin unless the fertilizer application qualifies under certain exemptions?

#### Law History:

The law was signed by Governor Doyle in April 2009 and the bill, 2009 Wisconsin Act 9 modified Chapter 94, Wisconsin Statutes. The intent of the law is to provide protection to Wisconsin's lakes, rivers, streams and other water resources from phosphorus run-off.

Under the new law, turf fertilizer that is labeled as containing phosphorus or available phosphate cannot be applied to residential lawns.

#### Background:

Phosphorus is an essential plant nutrient and a common ingredient in many fertilizers. Plants only absorb the amount of phosphorus they can use, so extra phosphorus can wash into lakes, rivers and streams which can lead to algae blooms and declining water quality.

#### Who can buy fertilizer with phosphorus and when:

No one may buy turf fertilizer that is labeled as containing phosphorus or available phosphate unless buyer use is:

- Establishing grass either by seed or by sod and the fertilizer is purchased during the same growing season as when the new grass or sod is established.
- Applying the fertilizer to an area that is deficient in phosphorus as shown by a soil test performed by a laboratory no more than 36 months before the application.

## Summary:

- Play it safe and save yourself some money and time. Fertilize in the autumn, never in spring. Spring applications can actually harm lawns by promoting more top (leaf) growth than root growth. Shallow root systems are unable to sustain lawns through a drought or a harsh winter.
- Fall fertilizer applications should be made when the average daily temperature drops to 50°F.
- When careless fertilization is followed by routine removal of grass clippings (a natural source of nitrogen) further fertilization is required. The cycle of fertilizing causes rapid growth causing more cutting and bagging causing more fertilizing, etc. gets to be time consuming and costly. It also increases the chance that fertilizer will be washed off to lakes and streams.
- Test the soil. Before planting a garden or fertilizing your lawn, have the soil tested. A soil test takes the guesswork out of fertilization.
- Fertilize lawns in the fall. Fall fertilization promotes healthy lawns with deep roots.
- Healthy trees and shrubs do not require an annual fertilizer application. Over fertilization of shrubs, in fact, will produce more growth and require more pruning.
- Sweep all fertilizers, soil, and vegetation off paved surfaces.
- Fertilizer, soil particles, grass clippings, and leaves contain nitrogen and phosphorus, which can cause nuisance algae growth if washed through storm sewers into nearby water-ways. In addition, decomposing leaves and grass clippings can rob streams and lakes of oxygen.

## CONCLUSION:

So save some time and money – forgo the fertilizer and instead go spend some quality time with the family. That will be beneficial to your family and our waterways.

For more information, see the Yard Care brochures.