YOUR LAWN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Use phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer to protect Minnesota lakes and rivers

Minnesota has recently passed a statewide law that restricts the use of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus, the primary nutrient that turns lakes green with algae.

New Phosphorus Law

Starting January 1, 2005, fertilizers containing phosphorus cannot be used on lawns in Minnesota. This is an expansion of the current state law that restricts the use of phosphorus in the Twin Cities metro area. Look for the middle number on a bag of fertilizer. It should be zero (0).

Keep fertilizer off paved surfaces: It's illegal to spread any fertilizer on hard surfaces such as streets, sidewalks, and driveways. Rain can wash the fertilizer into nearby storm drains or road ditches, eventually getting into a lake or river near you. If you accidentally spill or spread fertilizer on a hard surface, clean it up immediately.

Exemptions

Fertilizers containing phosphorus may be used on lawns if a soil test indicates that it is needed or if you are establishing a new lawn.

These restrictions do not apply to fertilizers used for agricultural crops, flower and vegetable gardening, or on golf courses by trained staff.

DO THE GREEN THING: FERTILIZE RESPONSIBLY Most garden centers and hardware stores carry phosphorus-free lawn fertilizers.

Will phosphorus-free fertilizer keep my lawn healthy?

Soils in most parts of Minnesota already have an adequate amount phosphorus to grow a healthy lawn. In these instances, adding more phosphorus in fertilizer is not needed and will not benefit your lawn.

THE PROBLEM: TOO GREEN

GREEN AND MUCKY Excess algae and weed growth is a major problem in many Minnesota lakes and waterways.

MORE PHOSPHORUS, LESS FISH Too much algae lowers oxygen levels and darkens the water. This can have a devastating effect on fish populations.

What to look for

On any bag or box of fertilizer, there is a string of three numbers. The middle number indicates phosphorus content and should read "0".

What can you do to protect water quality?

Fertilizers, leaves, grass clippings, eroded soil, and animal waste are all sources of phosphorus. When they are swept or washed into the nearest street or storm drain, they end up in your local lake or river. You can do your part to protect water quality by doing the following:

- Follow Minnesota's phosphorus lawn fertilizer law.
- Keep leaves and lawn clippings out of your gutters, streets, and ditches.
- Never wash or blow soil or grass clippings into the street.
- Pick up pet waste promptly. Pet waste can contain harmful bacteria as well as nutrients that cause excess algae and weed growth in lakes and rivers.

- Control soil erosion around your house. When left bare, soil is easily washed away with rain, carrying phosphorus with it. Soil erosion can be prevented by keeping soil covered with vegetation or mulch.

Sweep it up Grass clippings and leaves left on streets and sidewalks are a major source of phosphorus pollution in lakes and rivers.

Find out what you need: Test your soil

A soil test is a good idea, especially if you are concerned that your lawn may need phosphorus.

Instructions on soil testing are available through the University of Minnesota Extension Service's INFO-U by calling 612-624-2200 (metro) or 1-800-525-8636 and requesting message 468.

Soil testing information can also be obtained through the Internet by visiting **www.extension.umn.edu** and searching for "Lawn Soil Testing."

A list of laboratories certified for soil testing by the Minnesota Department of Agriculture can be found at **www.mda.state.mn.us/appd/soilabs.htm**.

Visit **www.reduce.org** for lots of ideas about reducing waste and toxic chemicals in your day-to-day life.

reduce.org

For more information on lawn care

- The **Yard & Garden Line** is the University of Minnesota Extension Service's one-stop telephone link to information about plants and insects in the home landscape. Call 612-624-4771 or visit www.extension.umn.edu/projects/yardandgarden.
- University of Minnesota **Extension Service's web site**: www.extension.umn.edu. From the home page click on "Garden" then on "Lawns."
- University of Minnesota Extension Service - **Sustainable Urban Landscape Information Series** (SULIS): www.sustland.umn.edu. From the home page, click on "Maintenance" then on "Sustainable Lawn Maintenance."
- **Minnesota Department of Agriculture**: www.mda.state.mn.us. From the home page, click on "Water & Land," then on "Lawn Care & Water Quality."
- **Minnesota Pollution Control Agency**: www.pca.state.mn.us. From the home page, click on "Water."

To obtain additional copies of this fact sheet

contact Office of Environmental Assistance's **Education Clearinghouse** at 1-800-877-6300, 651-215-0232 or e-mail: clearinghouse@moea.state.mn.us.

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