

Phosphorus free fertilizer is the way to go!

Let's face it, we all want lush green lawns, right? But before rushing out to apply oodles of fertilizer to green up the lawn after it's long winter sleep, please pause, take a breath, and learn a little bit about lawn fertilizer first so you can make some environmentally-friendly choices.

Research has shown that lawn fertilizer is impacting the environment and many states and communities are enacting laws to restrict the types of fertilizer you can use on your lawn. We do not currently have a lawn fertilizer ordinance in the City of Marshall, but you'll be doing the environment a big favor if you choose your fertilizer wisely and adhere to proper application rates and practices. Excessive or poorly applied fertilizers run off into streams, rivers, and lakes. This sounds like it only applies to country folks with acreage running alongside the water, but if you live in the city your water runoff goes into the storm sewers and eventually finds its way into our ground water or local rivers and lakes as well.

A report by the Michigan Environmental Council last year showed that excess phosphorous in our lakes stimulated the growth of algae and resulted in huge smelly algae blooms during the summer months. One staggering statistic was that "one pound of phosphorus can stimulate the growth of as much as 500 pounds of algae." That's a lot of algae! As if looking gross and smelling like a pig sty isn't bad enough, algae also starves off dissolved oxygen in the water, which is vital to fish and other aquatic life. And if that's not bad enough, the algae also clings to swimmers and structures, making the water unfit for recreation, let alone drinking.

Most lawns already have sufficient phosphorus to meet their needs. Soil testing programs in Michigan and other states have found that up to 99% of samples provided by homeowners already have enough naturally occurring phosphorus. Routinely using lawn fertilizer with phosphorus means much of the phosphorus will just run off into the storm drains, streams and lakes and stimulate algae blooms. So, what can you do reduce the phosphorus levels in our waterways?

* Have your lawn soil tested to see if it needs phosphorus. Michigan State Extension Service performs soil tests, and many lawn care and nursery stores also provide soil testing services. Every year on one Saturday in April a "**Super Soils Test Saturday**" is held locally where you can get free lawn soil testing. Watch for advertising beginning in early April on our City website and at local stores including Darlings Hardware, Oerthers, Jolly Green Junction, and Farm Bureau. *Contact them for more information.*

* Use phosphorus-free fertilizer. Every bag of fertilizer has three numbers that provide the percentage weight of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P) and potash (K). The middle number indicates the phosphate content and it should read "0". Please check the labels!



- * Use a slow-release fertilizer to promote steady, uniform grass growth and avoid over-fertilization and “burning” of grass. Slow release fertilizer is also less likely to drain away.
- * Remember – more is not better! Read your bag of fertilizer for the proper application rates and follow all instructions. Applying excess fertilizer is wasteful and will just leech into our waterways.
- * Sweep up any excess fertilizer that spills on your driveway or sidewalks. If not swept up, that fertilizer will go directly into the storm drain next time it rains and find its way to our waterways.
- * If you use a lawn care service to fertilize your lawn, ask them whether they are using a fertilizer containing phosphorus. If they say “yes”, ask them if a soil test was performed to indicate your lawn needs phosphorus. If they say “no”, require that they perform the soil test to determine whether your lawn needs phosphorus and to use a phosphorus-free fertilizer if the test shows you have adequate phosphorus in your soil.