

Reduce Your Fertilizer Footprint: And Other Ways to Maintain Your Lawn Without Polluting Waterways



Nuisance Nutrients in the Bay

Nutrients, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus, are key ingredients found in common lawn fertilizers. Though nitrogen is a natural element that all living things need to grow, excess nitrogen and other nutrients are harmful to ecosystems when they enter our waterways. When it rains, excess nutrients from lawn fertilizer can wash off the land and into the storm drains, streams, and rivers that feed the Chesapeake Bay. Once in our waterways,

excess fertilizers contribute to the growth of algae blooms that block sunlight from reaching Bay grasses, rob the water of oxygen, and threaten underwater life. In honor of Lawn Fertilizer Awareness Week (April 1-8, 2017), this bulletin will discuss Maryland's efforts to reduce nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay and how you as a homeowner can reduce your nutrient input through best management practices.

Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law

Did you know that there are over 1,300,000 acres of lawns in the state of Maryland? When the quantity of lawn fertilizers applied by homeowners is paired with the amount that is used on the 1,500,000 acres of planted cropland, fertilizers become a major source of nutrient pollution in the Chesapeake Bay. It is estimated that lawn fertilizer now accounts for approximately 44 percent of the fertilizer sold in Maryland.

The Maryland Lawn Fertilizer Law went into effect in 2013, establishing a "pollution diet" for the Chesapeake Bay. This law regulates how, when, and where fertilizer can be applied in an effort to protect the Chesapeake Bay from excess nutrients entering its waters from non-agricultural sources. These sources include golf courses, parks, recreation areas, athletic fields, businesses and hundreds of thousands



of urban and suburban lawns. The following fertilizer application restrictions were included in the law:

- Fertilizer cannot be applied within 15 feet of waterways or within 10 feet of waterways if a drop spreader, rotary spreader, or targeted spray liquid is used for application.
- Homeowners and Professionals are not to apply fertilizers between November 15 and March 1.
- University of Maryland fertilizer recommendations must be followed.
- Do not apply fertilizer when heavy rain is predicted.
- Fertilizer may not be used to de-ice walkways and driveways.
- Phosphorus may only be applied to lawns when a soil test indicates that it is needed or when a lawn is being established, patched, or renovated.

In addition to complying with the requirements of the Maryland Lawn Fertilizer Law, you can also do your part to keep your lawn and waterways healthy by following these best management practices:

- Read and follow all label directions on the fertilizer bag.
- Mow the grass high to shade out weeds.
- Remove no more than 1/3 of the grass height at each mowing.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn to provide free fertilizer.
- Sharpen lawnmower blades in the spring.
- Let established lawns go dormant during the hot, dry summer months.
- Plant native plant species! They reduce the need to fertilize, create native habitat, and reduce runoff because of their large root systems.



Visit the websites below for more information on lawn fertilizer application regulation and reduction:

<http://www.midshoreriverkeeper.org/how-can-i-reduce-or-eliminate-lawn-fertilizer/>
http://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Documents/fertilizerwebpage.pdf