

GUIDELINES FOR INSTALLING, FERTILIZING, AND MAINTAINING WATERFRONT LAWNS

Legislation took effect on January 1, 2012, regulating the use of fertilizers on waterfront property. P.A. 299 of 2010 specifically addresses the application of fertilizer on lawn or turf grass near rivers, streams, lakes and bodies of water. The new law is an attempt to reduce run off of fertilizers into lakes and streams. The runoff of fertilizers into lakes and streams adds unwanted nutrients that enable algae to bloom in lakes and streams. Responsible use of all fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides is always required to ensure good water quality in all of our lakes and rivers in Michigan. Always read and follow label directions on all fertilizer and pest control products, especially when near lakes and streams.

The new law prohibits the application of fertilizer closer than 15 feet from waterfronts. It also prohibits the use of Phosphorous (P) in a fertilizer mixture. Phosphorous can only be used if a new lawn is put in or a soil test indicates a lack of Phosphorous and indicates adding Phosphorous to correct imbalance.

One of the keys to reducing the runoff of fertilizers into waterways is to plan and install a lawn that has less need for fertilizers. A lower maintenance lawn, containing less than 50% Kentucky bluegrass mixed with fine fescues or improved perennial ryegrass, is desirable for a water front lawn. Such a lawn requires only two applications of fertilizer per year, one in late spring and one in late summer.

On established waterfront lawns, slow-release turf fertilizers are recommended with ratios that indicate little or no phosphorus and potassium. Quick-release fertilizers such as urea and ammonium nitrate are not recommended, as they are water soluble and wash into the waterfront during heavy rainfall. Never apply fertilizer at rates higher than recommended on the label, since the objective is to have the grass utilize all the fertilizer before it filters into the lake, river or stream. Another benefit of light fertilizing is that thatch will probably not become a problem.

Use herbicides only if weeds become a serious problem. Apply herbicides in late summer or early autumn to minimize turf runoff and reduce the chances of injury to woody ornamental trees. If only a few weeds are present, spot-treat during spring and fall.

Avoid excessive watering. Lawns require approximately one inch of water per week. Over-watering can contribute to nutrient run-off. Do not cut the lawn too short. The ideal cutting height is three inches to minimize disease and drought. The lawn can fertilize itself if a mulching mower is used and the clippings left on the lawn. This will reduce the need for nitrogen fertilizer for the lawn.

Rake and remove leaves from the lawn in the fall. This keeps them from shading the lawn and falling into the water where they will decompose and add to the nutrient load in the water. Where feasible, it is desirable to maintain a zone of natural vegetation between the lawn and the lake. The natural vegetation zone slows the surface flow of heavy rain falls, and helps intercept nutrients on their way to the lake, river or pond. This zone may consist of wildflowers, shrubs and/or trees, and may be designed so that it enhances the beauty of the landscape.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

https://www.canr.msu.edu/lawn_garden/

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