

LAWN FERTILIZER APPLICATION TIPS: LESS IS MORE!

Just like people, there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to fertilizing a lawn with water quality in mind. Basic understanding of lawns and soils leads to the right nutritional choices. (see also www.socwa.org.)

BASIC NUTRITION – PLANT STYLE

- Plants (including turf grasses) make their own food by trapping the sun's energy for photosynthesis. Sunlight is essential!
- The 14 nutrients needed for healthy lawns are minerals that come from the soil. They dissolve in water and plants take them up by their roots. We fertilize, because some plants require more of certain nutrients than are naturally available. Nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are the most important nutrients for turfgrass.
- Although many Michigan soils are already rich with phosphorus, there are some that need phosphorus. Often a low-phosphorus slow-release fertilizer will be helpful. A soil test is needed to determine whether any nutrient is needed.

HOW MUCH FERTILIZER?

- Never apply more than one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of turf at any time. Even better, apply 1/2 pound per application, and do it more often.
- How many bags of fertilizer do you need? Measure the GRASS AREA to be fertilized **before** going to the store to purchase fertilizer. Check the bag for the area covered at a rate of one pound nitrogen per 1000 square foot of lawn.
- Remember, nitrogen is a salt. Applying too much can burn the grass, since the grass can't metabolize it quickly enough. Excess nitrogen also promotes excessive growth.
- Like people, plants do better when they get the nutrients they need in a steady manner....not when they gorge at a buffet table! Fertilizers with 40% - 50% slow release nitrogen (or more) will contribute nutrients at a rate that can be used by grass roots.
- If you let the clippings lie on the lawn, fertilizer quantities can be reduced by 25 – 30% or more over the growing season. If you normally fertilize 3 times, this would mean reducing the applications to two – saving time and money. If you only fertilize once, the fall is the best time, since this is when grass roots are storing nutrients (for use in the spring.)/
- Taller grass supports healthy root growth and the plant's ability to absorb nutrients from the soil. Nutrient needs are affected by grass species, the environment, and more. Each home landscape is different! Lawn care for one yard may not be right for another!
- Lawns with organic matter in the soil (more than 5%) need less fertilizer. Older lawns with nutrient residual build up in organic matter need less fertilizer. Although compost spreaders are expensive equipment, there are some homeowners who will pay for the service.
- The key to putting down the right amount of fertilizer is reading the directions on the back of the bag. Twice as much is never twice as good. You don't take double dosages of medicine, so don't do it to your grass!

TIMING IS EVERYTHING!

- The best approach is to fertilize lightly and periodically throughout the growing season.
- Cool season grasses, such as Kentucky Bluegrass, are most active in the Spring and Fall when temperatures are between 60 and 75 degrees F.