

Phosphorus Fertilizer Restriction on Lawns

In December 2010 the Michigan Fertilizer Law Public Act 299, a statewide phosphorus application restriction, went into law. It prohibits the use of phosphorus fertilizers on residential and commercial lawns. Starting **January 1, 2012, a person shall not apply any fertilizer with phosphorus to lawns.**

Phosphorus is a nutrient found in fertilizer and is labeled as “P” in the equation N-P-K on the bag. After January 2012, only bags with the “P” as “0” will be sold (eg. 21-0-4).

Exceptions to using a fertilizer containing phosphorus include a soil test indicating that phosphorus is needed, or the establishment of a new lawn. Soil testing kits are available at the Saginaw County MSU Extension office for a nominal fee by calling 989-758-2500.

Proper fertilization is important for a healthy lawn which is an easy step to protecting our rivers and streams. When fertilizer is placed on a lawn at the right time and done the correct way, it strengthens the lawn by holding back soil and pollutants and minimizing the need for pesticides. Improper fertilization (leaving fertilizer on paved surfaces, using improper type, applying to frozen ground) harms our water because it washes into ditches, streams and storm drains. Phosphorus in our waterways causes algae to grow which looks and smells unsightly, it restricts recreational uses, and uses up all the oxygen in the water that fish need. One pound of phosphorus in our lakes and rivers can cause up to 10,000 pounds of aquatic plants and algae to grow and this will also create problems by choking our lakes with unwanted vegetation.

Want a vibrant spring lawn? Fertilize in the fall. Fall is the best time for lawns to absorb nutrients and develop a strong root system. And always make fertilizer-free zones by keeping a distance between fertilizer and rivers, lakes, ponds, storm drains or streams. This will protect these areas from excessive algae growth.

For a complete look at the Michigan Fertilizer Law, please visit www.michigan.gov/mda-fertilizer.