Choose Your Lawn Maintenance Program!

Choosing a low maintenance program for your lawn is generally the most environmentally favorable way to fertilize and is the program Suffolk County recommends. A low maintenance lawn can have a low impact to groundwater and surface waters while a high maintenance lawn has a higher potential impact on groundwater and surface waters.

Low maintenance lawns are usually not irrigated, do not receive pesticide applications, and are mowed infrequently. If you choose to fertilize, 1lb. or less of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per year is sufficient. Lawns may become dormant if it does not rain or if not irrigated in the summer. Consider no- or low-maintenance native landscaping.

High maintenance lawns are often irrigated, are mowed regularly, and may require pesticide applications. These lawns usually require more nitrogen fertilizers. If you choose a high maintenance program for your lawn, you should apply no more than 2-3 lbs. of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per year. A high maintenance lawn not only increases the potential for polluting groundwater and surface waters, but is more expensive for a homeowner to maintain.

Regardless of what maintenance program you choose, it is imperative to the health of our drinking water supply to apply turf fertilizers at the right time and to apply fertilizer correctly. Organic fertilizers can be used on both low and high maintenance lawns.

For more information:


About lawn care: Visit Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County’s website www.ccesuffolk.org

About watering lawns: www.nrcc.cornell.edu/grass/moisture/moisture.html

About lawns: Visit Cornell University’s website www.gardening.cornell.edu/lawn/index.html

Attention landscapers! As part of LL 41-2007, all Home Improvement Contractors licensed by Suffolk County who apply fertilizer to turfgrass, must take a Suffolk County approved turf management course.

To find out more information about the course, or to learn more about the Nitrogen Fertilizer Reduction Initiative visit Suffolk County’s website: http://www.suffolkcountyny.gov/departments/economicdevelopmentandplanning/waterqualityimprovement/fertilizerreductioninitiative.aspx

About the law: Visit Suffolk County’s website: http://legis.suffolkcountyny.gov/resos2007/i2117-07.htm

To visit the Healthy Lawns Clean Water website go to http://suffolkcountyny.gov/healthylawns

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Fertilizer applications are prohibited at this time. Turf is not actively growing so fertilizer is not effectively taken up by plants. Avoid using rotary spreaders near water or impervious surfaces. Lightly water in fertilizer after application. Avoid applying water soluble fertilizers when heavy rainfall is expected.

Tips for Applying Nitrogen Fertilizer to Established Lawns

- Make sure you know how big your lawn is and only apply the amount needed. Make sure the spreader is calibrated to apply the correct rate.
- Individual applications of nitrogen should not exceed 1 lb. per 1,000 sq. ft. and should total no more than 2-3 lbs. of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per year.
- Lightly water in fertilizer after application. Avoid applying water soluble fertilizers when heavy rainfall is expected.
- Avoid using rotary spreaders near water or impervious surfaces like roads, driveways and sidewalks.
- Sweep up any fertilizer that may land on driveways or sidewalks to avoid fertilizers reaching storm drains.

Best Practices for a Healthy Lawn

- Mow high – 3 inches or taller – to encourage roots to forage deeply for water and nutrients.
- Leave clippings on the lawn. They will add nutrients to your soil by returning organic matter back into the soil.
- Don’t overwater. On average, lawns need about 1 inch of water weekly from rainfall or irrigation. Overwatering can leach nutrients into groundwater.
- Check soil pH. When pH is 6.0 to 7.0, roots can absorb nutrients more efficiently. Apply lime to lower pH if necessary.
- Choose the best grasses for your site. When overseeding bare areas, use pest-resistant varieties and grasses that require less nitrogen.
- You can achieve a greener lawn naturally by selecting darker green grass varieties.

To protect our water, reduce

- This law was passed to reduce nitrogen pollution in our groundwater and surface water.
- Violators may be fined up to $1,000.
- April 1 is the deadline between November 1st and spring applications to lawns.