



Fertilizing Your Lawn this Spring not only Feeds your Grass, but Will Feed the Algae and Aquatic Plants in Lake George

Think twice about using unnecessary Phosphorus and Nitrogen **Native Vegetation requires no Fertilizers**

It's that time of year again when your lawn furniture and lakeside tables will be brought from storage and another season begins on Lake George. This is the time of year when fertilizer manufacturers claim that you need to apply *fertilizers* and *pesticides* to your lawn. If you live near the shore of Lake George or any one of Lake George's tributaries (streams, wetlands or any flowing water), any consideration of fertilizer use should also recognize the fact that the fertilizer will not feed only your lawn, but it will also feed Lake George. If you think that your lawn looks like it needs a boost, a simple soil test may indicate that your lawn actually does not require any fertilizer, and if applied, it will not be utilized by the grass. This excess fertilizer will find its way into the lake with runoff into surface water or in ground water, and will eventually feed the aquatic plants and algae in the Lake. Through photosynthesis, plants make their own food and have been prolific long before humans began using fertilizer. Adding fertilizer to your soil will not make up for poor soil conditions or for plants that may be located in an inappropriate site (such as trying to make sun-loving plants grow in a shady location).

All fertilizers have a series of three numbers on their label that indicates the percentage of each element or nutrient, generally 33-3-3 for a lawn fertilizer and 10-10-10 for flower or vegetable garden fertilizers. The first number is **nitrogen (N)**, the second is **phosphorus (P)** and the third is **potassium (K)**. A product labeled 33-3-3 N-P-K contains 33% N, 3% P and 3% K. Nitrogen (N) promotes green tissue, so it will feed lawns and leafy vegetables. Phosphorus (P) enhances flower and fruit production and helps roots to become established. Potassium (K) is good for the overall strength and vitality of plants.

Lawns only need nitrogen (N). If you have determined that your soil may benefit from a lawn fertilizer, choose a product where the first number (N) is higher than the other two numbers (P and K), such as 33-3-3 or 10-0-0. Products may not contain these exact numbers, but it is the relative ratio that is important. A '**No P Fertilizer**' is a preferred choice for lawns and can be purchased in many local stores and nurseries. Flowers and vegetable gardens use phosphorus (P) and require a more balanced ratio of N and P, such as 10-10-10 or 5-4-3. When watering container plants located on a dock or boathouse, do not allow excess water containing fertilizer to flow out of the container pots and drain into the lake. Better yet, avoid using fertilizer where runoff will flow into the lake.

Excess P travels with surface water, flowing directly into streams and the lake and promotes algae blooms and excessive aquatic plant growth. Excess N can become a problem because it is soluble and easily travels into the ground water and can affect the quality of your drinking water. To help protect our lake, avoid or limit the use of these two nutrients on your property.

In addition to choosing not to use a lawn fertilizer, you can also reduce the amount of nutrients that may enter the lake by doing the following activities:

- Plant a shoreline buffer to infiltrate and treat stormwater runoff before it leaves your property. A buffer will deter waterfowl from feeding on your lawn, as they need clear sight of their predators.
- Use bioretention cells or rain gardens as a means to infiltrate and treat stormwater before it leaves your property.
- Plant native species on your property. Native plants do not require the use of fertilizers and pesticides, and in addition, will not need to be watered.
- Reduce the amount of disturbance on your property. Preserve or restore the natural environment.
- Compost plant and grass clippings away from the lake and all streams. Decomposing plant debris will add additional nutrients into the lake.