



A Citizen's Guide to Lawn Fertilizer

True or False:

"More is better" when applying lawn fertilizer.

False! Over-fertilizing is a problem contributing to stormwater pollution in most rivers. Without realizing it, many landowners are applying fertilizers and pesticides when their lawns don't even need them! While applying an appropriate amount of fertilizer is usually okay, it's important to take care when adding chemicals to your lawn so that we can keep our rivers and streams healthy.



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Don't guess... soil test!



Don't assume your plants need fertilizer. Perform a soil test. You'll save money and reduce the chance of over-applying by only replacing the nutrients your soil is actually missing. Michigan State University Extension offers easy-to-use soil nutrient testing boxes, and recommends a soil test every two or three years.

To find out more, call the extension office in your area.

Choose the correct fertilizer

Use slow-release fertilizers that provide a slow, steady source of nutrients for plants. This also prevents the big spurt of growth common with synthetic fertilizers. Slow-release fertilizers come in a variety of types: organic, timed-release and coated. You may want to talk to a lawn care professional to find out what's best for your yard.



Avoid "weed-and-feed" mixtures. These contain herbicides to control weed growth and are often applied where they aren't needed. If healthy lawn care practices (correct mowing height and watering) are followed, weed control shouldn't be necessary. Be sure your mower is set to three inches to help shade out unwanted weeds.

How often, how much?



Unless you're maintaining a golf course, you can have a beautiful lawn by fertilizing only two or three times a year:

- Either apply twice a year, in late spring (late April or early May) and fall (September or October)
- Or apply three times a year, in late spring (Memorial Day), early fall (Labor Day) and late fall (Thanksgiving)



Pointers

for



pesticide use

Correct watering, mowing and fertilizing habits can reduce many pest problems. But if you do choose to treat for insects, it is essential that you know your enemy before you apply pesticides! If possible, hand pick the little buggers off the plants and identify the pest. The important part is to identify and treat only for the pests you have, at their most vulnerable stage.

For help identifying the bug that's been bugging you, call the Michigan State University Master Gardener Hotline.

A general spraying of insecticide is ineffective, costly and may do more harm than good.

