



Pennsylvania Urban Nutrient Management – Be Green While Protecting Our Streams

Protecting Pennsylvania’s Waterways Starts at Home.

Turfgrass has become a major component of Pennsylvania’s flora. In fact, according to DCNR, Pennsylvania now contains over 2 million acres of lawn. Selecting a proper turfgrass management program, whether it is on a private lawn, sports field, public park, or golf course, is essential to protecting our local waterways.

Know What Your Lawn Needs

When looking to apply nutrients to your lawn, make sure you are aware of what your lawn needs and what the Pennsylvania Fertilizer Law allows. To determine your lawn’s nutrient needs, it is best to first soil test. Soil tests provide specific recommendations for nitrogen, phosphate, and potassium. Following the soil test recommendations ensures that you are applying only what your lawn needs, thus reducing nutrient loss and fertilizer cost. Test kits can be purchased for a nominal fee from your local [Penn State extension office](#).

The Pennsylvania Fertilizer Law

In July 2022, Pennsylvania adopted a new [fertilizer law](#) designed to minimize the movement of nutrients into our waterways. Anyone who applies fertilizers should be aware of the following nutrient limitations.

- Nitrogen is limited to 0.9 pounds of total nitrogen and 0.7 pounds of available nitrogen per 1000 ft² per application.
- No phosphorus can be applied unless establishing or repairing turf.
- Both the nitrogen and phosphorus rates can be adjusted based on soil test recommendations and/or if using an enhanced efficiency fertilizer.
 - Enhanced efficiency fertilizers are specifically designed to reduce nutrient losses to the environment while increasing availability to plants.

In addition, when applying fertilizer, applicators must follow specific environmental conditions to prevent direct movement of fertilizer nutrients into our streams.

- Do not apply if a heavy rain is expected.
- Keep fertilizer away from drainage ditches, storm drains, or water.
- Maintain a 15-foot buffer from the banks of all waterways.
- Remove fertilizer that lands on impervious surfaces (i.e. driveways, sidewalks, roads) back onto the application area.
- Do not use as a snow or ice melt.
- Do not spread fertilizer on snow-covered or frozen ground.
- Fertilizer application between December 15 and March 1 is restricted to 0.50 lbs of total nitrogen per 1000 ft² per application.

Read the Label

Manufacturers of fertilizer products must include detailed labels that provide the nutrient content and instructions for use. As a fertilizer applicator, you are strongly encouraged to read and follow all directions and apply your fertilizer using a properly calibrated spreader.

Lawn Care Considerations

Nutrient management is not the only tool that can be used for limiting nutrient loss. There are many additional lawn care considerations that can be used to promote a healthy lawn while protecting our local waterways. A few examples are listed below.

Fertilizer may not be the solution. If your lawn is not looking as healthy and green as you would like, sometimes fertilizer is not the answer. Applying fertilizer without understanding the underlying soil can result in a waste of money and nutrients. There are many soil health factors that play a critical role in maintaining your lawn. Reducing soil compaction can improve root growth and water infiltration. Maintaining an appropriate soil pH is essential to promoting proper nutrient availability. Soil texture and organic matter content influence water movement, nutrient availability, and the microbial ecosystem of the soil. A healthy soil supports a healthy lawn.

Raise your mower deck. Set your mower deck to 3 inches or higher. A taller lawn provides shade that discourages weed growth and promotes strong root development helping lawns to withstand environmental stress. Alternatively, you can use [low mow turf](#) species, such as fine fescue blends, that do best when mowing is limited. A taller, healthier lawn slows water movement and increases infiltration keeping moisture, soil, and nutrients where they are needed most.

Mulch your grass clippings. Keeping your clippings in place returns valuable organic matter and nutrients to your lawn.

Provide a buffer. Do not mow up to the banks of streams. Maintaining vegetative buffers along waterways provides wildlife habitat while slowing and filtering water before it enters the stream.

Convert your lawn. Replacing turf with native vegetation not only increases water infiltration, but also promotes biodiversity and creates habitats for pollinators and other wildlife. For more information on Lawn Conversion visit DCNR's [website](#).

Working Together for Clean Water.

Environmental stewardship requires teamwork. Help protect Pennsylvania's waterways by being wise when you fertilize!

For more information on the Pennsylvania Fertilizer Law, visit the Department of Agriculture's website at www.agriculture.pa.gov/fertilizer or contact Denise Uzupis at duzupis@pa.gov.