

How To Maintain A Beautiful Lawn Without Contaminating Waterways With Excess Fertilizer

Many homeowners fertilize their lawns routinely without testing the soil to see what nutrients, if any, the soil lacks. The result is over-fertilizing, which creates elevated levels of phosphates and nitrates that wash into our waterways as contaminants. These contaminants cause algal blooms that deplete oxygen levels. Low levels of dissolved oxygen in rivers and streams threaten water quality and aquatic life.

UConn's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources recommends not fertilizing established lawns. For new lawns, or if an unfertilized lawn is not acceptable, UConn recommends soil tests to determine what nutrients should be added. For UConn's full recommendations, click here (<http://www.sustainability.uconn.edu/Lawnfertilizerrecommendations.html>)

In 2012 Connecticut passed a law that establishes certain restrictions on using and selling fertilizer containing phosphates. The following excerpt summarizes the law, which:

1. prohibits applying fertilizer containing phosphate to an “established lawn” except under certain conditions,
2. creates a seasonal moratorium on applying such fertilizer, and
3. bans applying fertilizer containing phosphate within 20 feet of a water body.

It exempts from these restrictions agricultural land, golf courses, and the application of fertilizer made from materials derived from plant or animal products containing naturally occurring phosphorus (“organic lawn fertilizer”).

The law requires retail establishments to separately display fertilizer containing phosphate and post a sign about the use restrictions. It establishes a civil penalty of \$ 500 for violating the restrictions or retail requirements and allows the agriculture commissioner to adopt regulations to implement the law's fertilizer-related requirements.

The law also expands the water quality projects eligible for Clean Water Fund moneys to include certain nutrient removal projects, as opposed to only projects for nitrogen removal. Click here to read the entire bill. (link to : <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2012/fc/2012SB-00254-R000364-FC.htm>)

Click here for more information on the proper use of phosphates and nitrogen for fertilizing. (<http://www.conngardener.com/phosphorus.html>)