



West Virginia Conservation Agency

Keeping Your Yard Green Or Our Streams Clean?

You Can Have Both!

A West Virginia Homeowner's Guide To Environmentally Sound Lawn Care

A Healthy Compromise

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed covers six states and is inclusive of West Virginia. It is home to 3,600 species of plants and animals and also to 15.1 million people, with a projected growth of another 2.8 million by the year 2020. We have come to understand that what we do in our backyards influences our local streams and rivers and eventually the Bay itself. With so many people living within the watershed, nonpoint source pollution has become a problem for living resources within the waterways. Non-point source pollution includes runoff from streets, farms, construction sites and our own yards. This fact sheet highlights conservation practices that homeowners can apply to home, lawn and garden projects to promote better water quality. By concentrating on what we as homeowners can do locally, we can protect the natural resources we have been entrusted with as well as reaping the benefits of a more beautiful backyard.



FERTILIZER 101

Have Your Soil Tested! This can be done relatively easily and is a free service offered through the West Virginia University Extension Service. Soil test kits can be picked up at your local Extension Office. Testing your soil will determine the proper type and amount of fertilizer required for your garden or lawn. The test results will reflect your soils pH (acidity), phosphorous, potassium and magnesium as well as other nutrients needed for healthy plants. Soil samples should be taken before the planting season.



SAMPLE YOUR SOIL:

- **Vegetable Gardens: Every Year**
- **New Lawns: After Grading, Before Seeding**
- **Established Lawns, Landscape Plants, and Perennial Gardens: Every Three Years**

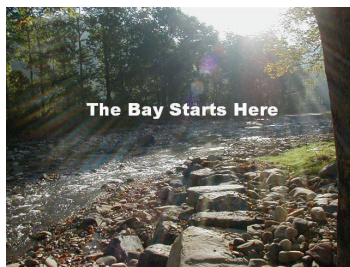
Fertilizers Simplified. Fertilizer labels portray 3 numbers indicative of the percentage of **nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium**, the three main plant nutrients. Example: a 100 pound bag of 15-10-10 fertilizer contains 15% nitrogen 10% phosphorous, and 10% potassium.

When fertilizing trees and lawns, look for fertilizers that display **Water Insoluble Nitrogen (WIN)**. This means the nitrogen will release slowly over time.

Fertilize only as needed to maintain the health and quality of your lawn. **DO NOT OVER-FERTILIZE.** NEVER apply more than 1 pound of soluble nitrogen per 1,000 square feet at one time. You will be wasting your time, money and potentially affecting the health of our streams. Lawn fertilizer is measured in pounds per square feet. **To determine square feet, multiply length by the width of your area to be fertilized.**

Never fertilize your lawn when it is dormant (brown). You want to fertilize when the grass is actively growing and can take up the nutrients.

Why Fertilize? If your lawn is not properly maintained, your grass will become thin and more susceptible to weeds. One of the positive environmental sides to fertilizing properly is less chance of soil and nutrient runoff with a healthy stand of grass. Healthy lawns are less susceptible to disease, insect and weed problems, thus reducing the need for pesticides.



FERTILIZER 101 Cont.....

Timely Application: Warm season grasses such as Bermuda grass, should be fertilized in the early summer because this is when they are most actively growing. Cool season grasses such as fescue, bluegrass and rye, should be fertilized primarily in the late summer to early fall to help grass recover from the stress of summer. Nitrogen uptake in the fall is at its peak for cool season grasses.

MOWING

The rule of thumb for mowing is remove **no more than 1/3 of the grass blade** each time you mow. Mowing to the proper height can reduce weed problems by 50-80%. Low and infrequent mowing can damage your lawn as well. Also, maintain a sharp mower blade all season; dull blades damage grass.

Mowing

	Spring & Summer	Fall & Winter
Tall Fescue	2 1/2"-3 1/2"	2 1/2"
Perennial Ryegrass	2 1/2"-3"	2"-2 1/2"
Kentucky Bluegrass	2 1/2"- 3 1/2"	2"-2 1/2"
Fine Fescue	2 1/2"- 3 1/2"	2 1/2"
Bermuda Grass	1/2" -1"	1/2"-1 1/2"

Guide

Recycle Grass Clippings: Consider leaving grass clippings on your lawn after mowing. This allows "recycling" of nutrients and will allow you to use less nitrogen fertilizer in the future. If clippings are too heavy, rake up and use in your compost pile.

A Few More Tips:

- Control storm water runoff by directing down spouts and gutters to drain into the lawn, plant beds, etc. where rainwater will be absorbed rather than running off.
 - Never apply fertilizers to driveways or walks to de-ice.
- Try not to fertilize right before a heavy rain; nutrients will be washed away and result in pollution of waterways.
 - Be sure to calibrate your spreader for accurate application.
- When planting trees and shrubs, try to plant native species which will require less fertilization.
- As a rule of thumb, fertilize recently transplanted trees and shrubs once a year, preferably in the fall.
- Consider Integrated Pest Management Practices when dealing with pests and weeds rather than potentially toxic chemicals. Contact your Extension Agent or your local Conservation District on how you can integrate IPM into your landscape.

Congratulations and thank you for taking the first step to a better backyard and a healthier environment for everyone. By following just a few simple guidelines you will reap the benefits of a more manageable, beautiful yard while protecting our local streams and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. What you do in your backyard influences everyone, spread the word to your neighbors!

For more information lawn care tips and things you can do as a homeowner to protect the environment, contact:

The West Virginia Conservation Agency
 Moorefield Field Office 304.538.7581
 Martinsburg Field Office 304.263.4376
www.wvca.us

Your Local Conservation District
 Potomac Valley Conservation District 304.822.5174
 Eastern Panhandle Conservation District 304.263.4376
The Chesapeake Bay Program
 1.800.YOURBAY
www.chesapeakebay.net

