

Friday's Feature

By

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Be Florida-friendly with your fertilizer

Having difficulty finding your favorite lawn fertilizer in the stores? You may have noticed that many fertilizers are now "phosphorus free." This is in response to a current Florida legislative rule that regulates the types of fertilizers sold for lawn applications.



The "Florida Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule" is designed to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus losses which can create water pollution when fertilizers are not applied correctly.

Florida is covered with water. The state boasts over 10,000 miles of rivers and streams, about 7,800 lakes, more than 700 freshwater springs, and the second-longest coastline in the United States. Even if you do not reside on a waterfront, the land you live on is directly connected to a nearby water body. What you do in your yard has further-reaching consequences than you might imagine.

While a properly maintained lawn filters stormwater runoff, reduces erosion and helps prevent pollution, improper fertilization can pollute our water resources, compromise the health of our plants, and result in wasted money and unnecessary maintenance.

A major concern is phosphorus, the second number on the fertilizer bag. Phosphorus that finds its way into

our water through runoff, erosion or failure to remove fertilizer from a hard surface may contribute to eutrophication of Florida's surface water bodies. Eutrophication is the enrichment of water with nutrients that results in excessive aquatic plant (mostly algae) growth. With time, oxygen depletion of eutrophic waters can lead to fish kills.

While fertilization can be beneficial for our lawns, be sure to use the right type, the right amount and apply it correctly.

The amount of phosphorus in the fertilizer you buy should be based on soil test results. If a soil test indicates that your phosphorus level is adequate, use a fertilizer with zero, or no more than 2 percent, phosphorus.

Establish a buffer zone around water bodies. By surrounding all water bodies with a maintenance-free "ring of responsibility," potential pollutants can be blocked from entering the water. In this buffer area, there should be no fertilization and no chemical applications.

The fertilizer-free zone for protection of water bodies is a minimum of either 3 or 10 feet, depending on soil type, slope, and type of fertilizer spreader. The minimum should be 3 feet when either a drop spreader, rotary spreader with deflector shield, or handheld hose sprayer is used. The minimum should be 10 feet when a rotary spreader without a deflector shield is used.

The buffer zone can be as simple as allowing turfgrass to grow naturally around the water. Native aquatic plants can also be used to create a beautiful waterfront view; pickerelweed, cannas and iris are just a few of the flowering beauties available.

After applying the right fertilizer and the right amount, water it in by irrigating with only enough water to remove the granules from the grass blades—about $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of water. And never fertilize right before a rain storm.

Be sure to sweep up any fertilizer that reaches a hard surface like a drive way or sidewalk. And never sweep or blow lawn debris into a storm drain.

Confused about lawn fertilization? Just pick up the phone and call your local Extension Office for help choosing the right fertilizer for your lawn.

Theresa Friday is the Environmental Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee,

warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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