

Be smart when applying fertilizer to your lawn

In pursuit of the perfect lawn many homeowners may find themselves spreading just a 'little extra' fertilizer to give their lawn a boost. However, contrary to belief, applying too much fertilizer can be harmful to the lawn and our waterways. Most lawns don't require consistent fertilizer application. Lawns that are over fertilized risk turf damage, releasing excess greenhouse gasses, and contaminating our waterways. When fertilizers are applied in excess or not as directed on the label the more likely it will enter a waterway. Once in a waterway fertilizer can cause algal blooms to occur. When algae die, the decomposing bacteria use oxygen, which can drop to levels too low for fish to breath. Some blooms, like blue-green algae, release toxins into the water and air making it dangerous for wildlife and humans. Every summer algal blooms are responsible for the closing of popular swimming spots across the nation.

Applying lawn fertilizer may seem simple, but if not done correctly it can have unforeseen environmental impacts. Here are guidelines to help:

- Have the soil tested by the NC Haywood County Extension office to determine if fertilizer is needed (828-456-3575).
- Follow the application instructions.
- Don't apply before a heavy rain event.
- Fill spreaders on a hard surface so any spills can be easily picked up.
- Provide natural vegetative strips along waterways.
- Avoid applying near a stormdrain.
- Save the rake and bagging, use a mulching mower; decomposing grass clippings provide nutrients and reduce the need for fertilizers. Plant trees or shrubs along streams and ditches to create a runoff absorbing buffer.
- Consider starting a compost!

Pursuing the perfect lawn may be the goal, but is it worth the financial and environmental costs? Take pride in a natural lawn!

