

## Lawn Fertilizers Pollute Waterways

Americans take great pride in their lawn, but the price for the perfect lawn can damage the environment. Applying too much or not at the right time can cause issues in waterways. According to the EPA, 40 to 60% of the fertilizer applied to lawns ends up in a waterway or ground water as a result of careless application, which stimulates excess algae growth. This can overwhelm the natural balance of the ecosystem. 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. These toxins, at high levels, can be life threatening to humans, aquatic life, and contaminate drinking water supplies.

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 (828-456-3575) to determine if fertilizer is needed.
- 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.
- Avoid applying near a waterway or 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.

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

