

What does lawn fertilizer have to do with the Mississippi River?

Fertilization is part of maintaining healthy grass, but needs to be done properly to avoid polluting our ground and surface water. Healthy lawns reduce soil erosion and runoff into stormdrains that lead directly to the Mississippi River, which keeps our water cleaner.

Consider the following before buying and applying fertilizer:

- **Leave grass clippings on your lawn.** Grass clippings are like free fertilizer because they contain important nutrients that are added back to the soil when left on the lawn. Mowed clippings are equal to about one fertilizer application per year, reducing the amount of fertilizer you need to buy.
- **Fertilize in the fall.** Most lawns only need to be fertilized once per year around Labor Day. Fertilizing in the fall promotes strong roots and prepares grass for vigorous growth in the spring.
- **Use a fertilizer with slow-release nitrogen.** Slow-release nitrogen reduces the need for frequent fertilizer applications. It is less likely to run off into surface water or seep into groundwater, making it safer for our water resources.
- **Know how much to apply.** Check the bag for the correct application rate. Excess fertilizer is not taken up by grass and will wash off lawns when it rains. Additionally, if fertilizer spills on hard surfaces, like a sidewalk, clean it up right away. This is a Minnesota law and will prevent fertilizer from running off through stormdrains to the Mississippi River.

For more information on sustainable yard maintenance, visit:

<http://www.sustland.umn.edu/maint/selectin.htm>.



The three numbers on a fertilizer bag stand for the percent of Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium that make up the mix. Use of lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus is restricted in Minnesota. The middle number on the bag should always be zero, unless you are establishing a new lawn or a soil test shows a need for phosphorus.