

## **Green Lawns and Clear Waters: Fall Fertilizing for Your Yard and the Bay**

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For many homeowners, a lush green lawn sprawling across their yard is a source of pride and the result of hard work. Lots of us enjoy the look and feel of grass. Properly applied, fertilizer can help build a healthy lawn; but those same fertilizers that enliven your lawn can have harmful effects on the Bay, especially as more homes with large yards pop up across the watershed.

- If applied improperly, nitrogen and phosphorus in fertilizer can end up running off your yard and into a local stream or river (and eventually the Bay).
- Too many of these nutrients cause rapid growth of phytoplankton, which can have devastating consequences for underwater grasses and aquatic life.

So can a green lawn and clean Bay coexist? The answer is yes, especially if folks fertilize properly. Limiting fertilizer to one application in fall may be the most effective, “Bay-friendly” technique. Many cool season grasses, such as tall fescues and Kentucky bluegrass, do best with a light application in early fall. If a spring application is necessary (as may be the case with some warm season species), applying the proper amount of fertilizer at the right time is key.

If you'd like to have a great yard that doesn't harm the Bay, here's some more useful information:

- [Consider Organic Fertilizer](#), which typically releases nutrients slower and over a longer period of time than synthetic fertilizers. This can lead to less leaching of nutrients out of your soil and into a waterway.
- [Identify your grass](#). There's a good chance the species of grass in your yard won't need more than a light fall fertilizing. Knowing what kind of grass you have will help you determine the proper care to give it.
- [BayScape Your Yard](#): Less lawn means less fertilizer, and yards that use native plants for landscaping require less mowing and pesticides too. Minimize pollution and beautify your backyard by BayScaping.

### **Fall Fertilizer TIPS:**

- Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines when you fertilize your lawn. Some common fertilizing rules of thumb include:
  - [Test your soil](#) before applying; you may not need to fertilize at all.
  - Keep fertilizer off hard surfaces (sidewalks, driveways, etc.) where it will easily wash off your property and toward local streams (remember, that storm drain at the end of the street eventually ends up in a stream!).
  - Avoid applying fertilizer to swales or other drainage areas in your lawn.
  - Never apply fertilizer to dormant lawns or to frozen ground.

- Do not use fertilizer as a de-icer.
- Consider using a [professional lawn care service](#) that follows the Chesapeake Club standards for fertilizer application.

**Other Sites of Interest:**

- [\*Homeowners' Guide to Designing Your Property\*](#) - a guide developed by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay that offers helpful tips for implementing the concepts of BayScaping in your backyard.
- [\*Lawns and the Chesapeake Bay\*](#) - a fact sheet developed by the Maryland Cooperative Extension regarding lawn care in the region.
- [\*Tips on Keeping Your Lawn Green and the Chesapeake Bay Clean\*](#) - a brochure developed by the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
- [Lawn Care Tips](#) - Chesapeake Club's Web site with facts and information on getting and maintaining a Chesapeake-style lawn.