

Lawn Care and Our Local Waterways

Proper Lawn Care is an Essential Part of Protecting the Health of Our Local Waterways

Plants can only utilize a certain percentage of applied fertilizer and the excess washes away with the rain into ground water, neighboring streams, lakes, ponds, and reservoirs. The excess nitrogen and phosphorus from the fertilizer causes above normal population levels of weeds and algae, thus absorbing greater amounts of oxygen that fish and other aquatic life need to survive.

On Jan. 5, 2011 the state of NJ enacted, New Jersey Act P.L. 2010, c.112 (c.58:10A-64), which establishes standards for fertilizer applications to turf, requires certification of professional fertilizer applicators, and regulates labeling and sale of specialty fertilizers for turf. The Act was conceived to protect all NJ surface and ground waters from impairment by minimizing nitrogen and phosphorus loading that may be derived from fertilizer.

Rutgers maintains a list of all certified and trained fertilizer applicators at

<http://profact.rutgers.edu/pages/certified-applicators.aspx>

Learn more about this Act at

<http://snyderfarm.rutgers.edu/fertilizerlawfaq.html>

Pesticides also play a part. The U.S. Geological Survey provided the most comprehensive national-scale analysis to date of pesticide occurrence and concentrations in streams and ground water, **Pesticides in the Nations Streams and Ground Water 1992-2001**. They found that pesticides are frequently present in streams that may effect aquatic life or fish eating wildlife. At least one pesticide was detected in water from all streams studied and pesticide compounds were detected throughout most of the year from streams with agricultural use 97% of the time, urban 97%, and mixed-land use watersheds 94%.

Locally on the table is the Safe Playing Fields Act (S.2610:A3782), which would restrict the use of lawn care pesticides at child care centers, schools, playgrounds, and recreational fields. The legislature is on a budget break and hopefully this bill will be heard in committee when session begins May 2012.

We are a densely populated area with many local waterways around us. Every little action plays a big part.

Water Friendly Lawn Care Tips

- Select fertilizers that have **no phosphorus** with **slow-release water insoluble nitrogen**. Organic fertilizers with **low** phosphorus are allowed by law since the phosphorus is derived naturally. Read and follow the instructions on the fertilizer label.
- Cut lawn no shorter than 3 inches high.
- Fertilize with care and use environmentally friendly products.
- Avoid spreading fertilizer on paved areas and sweep back onto turf if it does.
- Don't fertilize right before a large rain event.