

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA FERTILIZER LAW

Proper fertilizer application helps restore our rivers and streams.

**Guidance for Residents**



# DON'T FERTILIZE UNLESS YOU NEED TO

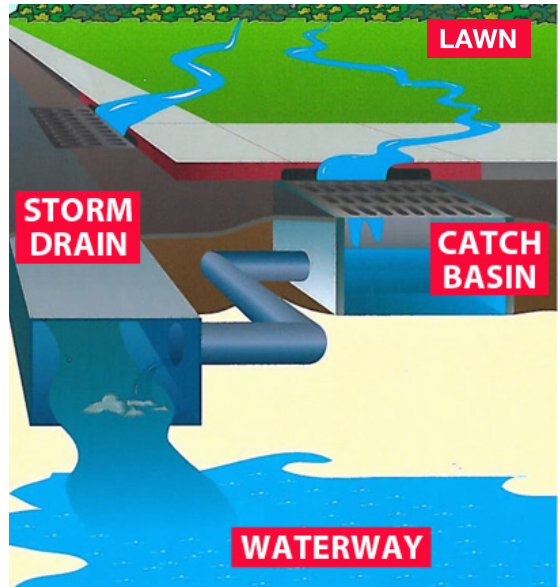
Established lawns rarely need fertilizer, and proper lawn care can reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizer. Reducing fertilizer saves money, grows a healthier lawn, protects fish and wildlife, and helps restore our waterbodies.

## Fertilizer Can Harm the Environment

In two-thirds of the District, water that runs off properties carries fertilizer and other pollutants directly into our rivers and streams with little or no treatment.

### Excess fertilizer can:

- **Degrade fish and wildlife habitat**
- **Harm insects that pollinate flowers to make fruit and vegetables**
- **Make waterways smell bad**
- **Cause rapid growth of algae and weeds**
- **Deplete oxygen in waterbodies**
- **Release nitrous oxide, a powerful greenhouse gas that is 300 times more effective at warming the climate than carbon dioxide**



# IF YOU NEED TO APPLY FERTILIZER

- 1 Test your soil first** and only add the recommended nutrients. Find resources at [doee.dc.gov/fertilizer](https://doee.dc.gov/fertilizer).
- 2 Select the right mix.** Use low-phosphorus fertilizer with at least 20% slow-release nitrogen. See page 4 for recommended application rates.
- 3 Learn to read the label.** Fertilizer is labeled in this order to show the percentage by weight of key nutrients:  
**Nitrogen (N) Phosphorus (P) Potassium (K).**  
  
**For example:** A 25-lb bag marked “10-0-6” has 2.5 lbs (10%) of nitrogen, 0 lbs (0%) of phosphorus, and 1.5 lbs (6%) of potassium. The remaining 21 lbs (84%) are filler, or inert ingredients, that help disperse the chemicals.
- 4 Fertilize from late spring to early fall**, depending on your type of grass. Applying in the fall provides reserves for quick green up in the spring. Applying too early in spring feeds the weeds. Don’t apply between November 15 and March 1, or when the ground is frozen. Dormant grass can’t use fertilizer.





# IF YOU NEED TO APPLY FERTILIZER

**5** **Make sure the soil is moist but not wet** so fertilizer will soak in. It will run off soil that is too wet or too dry. Do not apply fertilizer when it is raining or 24 hours before it is expected to rain.

**6** **Keep away from waterbodies.** Do not apply fertilizer within 15 feet of a creek, stream, river, wetland, or drainage ditch.

**7** **Keep off hard surfaces** like sidewalks, patios, and driveways. If fertilizer lands on hard surfaces, promptly sweep it back onto the grass or return it to a proper storage container.

**8** **Use the right equipment.** Never apply fertilizer by hand. Use a targeted spray applicator, a drop spreader, or rotary spreader with a deflector shield. Adjust your equipment settings often to ensure fertilizer spreads evenly and at the correct rate.

**9** **Store fertilizer inside** in a closed, waterproof container.



# RECOMMENDED RESIDENTIAL FERTILIZER RATES

- Leave grass clippings on your lawn to provide nutrients throughout the growing season.
- Before applying any fertilizer, test your lawn’s soil to determine the amount of nutrients needed. Healthy lawns should not need fertilizer more than once per growing season.
- Do not apply any fertilizer from November 15 through March 1.
- Do not apply any **phosphorus** unless the soil test calls for it.
- Apply **nitrogen** at the following annual rates even if the soil test calls for more. Use nitrogen that is at least 20% slow release (water insoluble).

## NITROGEN APPLICATION RATES

GRASS TYPE	ANNUAL MAXIMUM	DATE OF APPLICATION
TALL FESCUE	1.8 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup>	SEPTEMBER = 0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup> OCTOBER = 0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup> , IF NEEDED
KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS	1.8 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup>	SEPTEMBER = 0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup> OCTOBER = 0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup> , IF NEEDED
FINE FESCUE	0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup>	OCTOBER
ZOYSIAGRASS	0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup>	JUNE
BERMUDAGRASS	1.8 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup>	JUNE = 0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup> JULY = 0.9 LBS/1,000 FT <sup>2</sup> , IF NEEDED

**Note:** Lawn care professionals should follow the application rates posted at [doee.dc.gov/fertilizer](http://doee.dc.gov/fertilizer).



# TIPS FOR HEALTHY LAWN MAINTENANCE

**Remove no more than 1/3 of the grass height** each time you mow to help shade out weeds and conserve moisture.

**Water early in the morning** using a sprinkler, and keep the water off sidewalks, walkways, and the street.

**Leave grass clippings** on the lawn to provide free, slow-release fertilizer.

**Water slowly;** wet to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Avoid light, frequent watering or watering in the evening, which can damage your lawn.

**Let established lawns go dormant** during the hot, dry summer months.

**Place a container on the lawn when watering.** After you collect one inch of water, you can turn off the sprinkler.



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OF ENERGY &  
ENVIRONMENT

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**FIND OUT MORE:**  
[DOEE.DC.GOV/FERTILIZER](https://doee.dc.gov/fertilizer)  
202-535-2600  
1200 FIRST STREET NE