

FERTILIZER



Fertilizer Law

The District of Columbia's fertilizer law applies primarily to landscape professionals, but it also provides important guidance for District homeowners and residents on how, when, and where to apply fertilizer to lawns. Fertilizers help create lush green lawns, but also have the potential to contaminate our local streams, rivers, and groundwater. Improper application of fertilizer is harmful to the health of your lawn, the environment, and human health.

Proper lawn care can reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizer. Keep your lawn at least three inches tall; taller grass has deeper, healthier roots, prevents weed infestations, and is more drought-tolerant. When you do mow, mulch the clippings back into your lawn to add nitrogen to your soil.

What's in fertilizer?

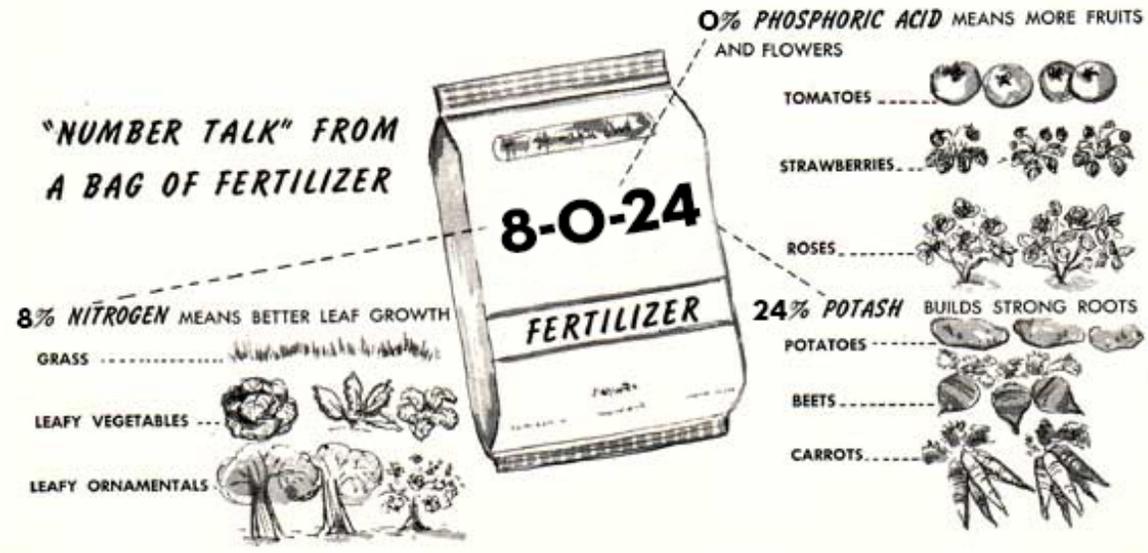
All fertilizers are labeled with three numbers that show the percentage, by weight, of key nutrients that contribute to plant growth and health. These nutrients, when over-applied, can cause serious environmental harm:

N - Nitrogen – Nitrogen contributes to the growth of healthy, green leaves. Only apply a fertilizer that contains nitrogen if it is at least 20% slow release. An overabundance of nitrates in our waterways can contribute to algal blooms and contaminate our groundwater supply.

P - Phosphorus – Phosphorus encourages root development, but it also contributes to rapid growth of algae and weeds, depleting the oxygen in our waterways and seriously harming fish and other aquatic wildlife. Do not use fertilizers that contain phosphorus unless a test shows that the soil is deficient!

K - Potassium – Potassium increases stress tolerance and disease resistance.

FERTILIZER



- Use organic fertilizer when possible – food and yard waste can be composted to make your own organic fertilizer at home.
- Remember, fertilizer that washes off your yard and into the street enters the storm drain system, which often leads directly to the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers.

When and where to fertilize

- Do not apply fertilizer within 15 feet of a waterbody or near a storm drain or drainage ditch. (A waterbody is a creek, stream, river, wetland, or other similar water resource).
- Do not apply fertilizer between November 15th and March 1st.
- Do not apply fertilizer when it is raining. Wait at least 24 hours after a rain storm before fertilizing.
- Fertilizer applied to dormant plants or dry or frozen ground is not taken up and instead runs off into nearby creeks and streams.

How to fertilize

- Test your soil before applying any fertilizer! Local nurseries and university labs can conduct soil nutrient tests for a fee. Only apply the nutrients recommended by a soil test.
- Calibrate your fertilizer spreader appropriately. Each fertilizer will come with detailed application instructions specific to that product, including recommended spreader settings.
- Overlap fertilizer by spreading half of the fertilizer in one direction and the rest in the opposite direction to ensure even application.
- Turn off the spreader when walking over sidewalks or driveways. Never apply fertilizer to impervious surfaces. If you accidentally apply fertilizer to walkways, clean it up with a broom and not a hose.