

HEALTHY LAWN, HEALTHY LAKE 2023



Our lake piers are going in and our yard work will soon begin. Spring is here! Did you know that your lawn care choices can affect the lake? Our lake water quality problems and solutions begin on the land. When rainwater runs off the land, it carries pollutants into our lake. This results in algae blooms, invasive weeds, muddy lake water, bacteria, nuisance geese and a decline in the fish population.

One of the issues facing our lake water health is the amount of chemicals we use to maintain an “ideal” lawn. What can you do to make sure your lawn care does not harm our lake and your health? Follow these basic guidelines to green up your lawn, and not our lakes.

Avoid Fertilizers with Phosphorus - Most mature lawns do not need fertilizers at all, particularly fertilizer with phosphorus in it. If you choose to use fertilizer, use slow-release nitrogen fertilizer that will be better for your lawn and the lake. Did you know that one pound of phosphorus running off into the water can grow 10,000 pounds of weeds and algae?

A fertilizer with no phosphorus means that the middle number on the fertilizer package listing the nutrient ratio, nitrogen:phosphorus:potassium is 0.

Mow High - Set your lawn mower at 3" and keep your blades sharp. Taller grass crowds out weeds and encourages deep roots. This results in a healthier lawn that needs less water. You may consider leaving the clippings on your lawn too. Why bag up all of those natural nutrients that can help keep your lawn green without extra chemicals? Plus, mowing less and leaving the clippings leaves more time for lake fun!

Consider Your Shoreline - Do not fertilize or mow to the edge of the lake. A taller buffer along the lakefront helps prevent pollutants like phosphorus, nitrogen, and herbicides from washing into the lake. You can also plant a buffer of native grasses and wildflowers along the shoreline that will add beauty, provide fish habitats, food for pollinators and will prevent geese from loitering on your lawn.

Fertilize at the Right Time - Fertilize only when the lawn is actively growing and able to take up nutrients, like in the spring and fall. Be sure to remove all fertilizer from walkways and driveways before it can wash off into storm drains and into our lake and streams. In the case of fertilizer – less is better!

Simple yard decisions such as the what you use to fertilize impacts the health of our waters. Before putting chemicals on your lawn, ask yourself if you or your kids would want to be swimming in them. Water that runs off the land carries everything from bacteria-laden pet waste, to those herbicides and pesticides. If it can kill the bad things, it can hurt the good pollinators, fish and plants too!

Resources: Find useful publications in the Turfgrass Management series by visiting the Purdue Extension Education Store: www.the-education-store.com. Also, much of this content came from a wonderful Indiana resource, The Watershed Foundation. They have been focused on healthy shoreline initiatives for many years. www.watershedfoundation.org