

Washington Friends of Farms & Forests

Fertilizer Factsheet

Fertilizer can help make turf healthy. In order to get the most out of your fertilizer while protecting local water quality, follow the specific directions on the product label and read the tips below.

Test soils before using phosphorous fertilizer:

- The amount of phosphorous applied should be based on soil test results.
- Before planting a new lawn, have your soil tested for pH and nutrient content.
- Soil test samples should be collected 4 inches deep from areas that are different in soil texture, color, plant types, previous fertilizer applications, organic amendments or lime.

When to apply:

- Application of fertilizer to recently planted or developing turf helps build strong root systems.
- Turfgrass established from sod is fertilized during its production and may require less phosphorus than seeded turf. Follow the directions from the sod farm.
- The best time to apply fertilizer is following core aeration of the turf in spring or early fall. Aeration is often necessary in compacted or poorly-drained soils.
- Fertilizer should not be applied immediately prior to mowing. If an area is fertilized, the clippings should not be collected for the first several mowings or until the pellets have dissolved.
- Light to moderate rainfall following fertilizer application can help water the fertilizer in, but avoid fertilization if heavy or prolonged rain is in the forecast.
- In colder climates, do not apply fertilizer when the ground is frozen. In areas with heavy snowfall, do not apply fertilizer when snowmelt is at its peak.
- Phosphorous is not highly mobile in soils because it binds to the soil. When properly applied, it will be absorbed by turfgrass.

Where to apply:

- Never apply fertilizer on an impervious surface such as asphalt or a sidewalk. Fertilizer can run off of impervious surfaces into stormwater. If fertilizer spills onto an impervious surface, sweep it off onto the turf or back into the bag.
- Always leave a 5-10 foot buffer strip between fertilized area and open water (such as a lake or river).
- Organic fertilizers are relatively high in phosphorous and may not be appropriate if soil phosphorous is adequate.

Remember to ask the 4 R's before application:

1. Is this the **RIGHT SOURCE** for your lawn? Is this the product your lawn needs?
2. Are you applying the **RIGHT RATE** for your lawn? What does your soil test say?
3. Is this the **RIGHT TIME** to apply fertilizer? What is the weather forecast?
4. Are you applying in the **RIGHT PLACE**? Is there a water body nearby?

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