

Why did the City of Ann Arbor ban phosphorus in lawn fertilizer?

The city is under a federal mandate to reduce phosphorus levels in the Huron River by 50 percent in order to meet water quality standards. Runoff from residential lawn fertilization is the primary source of phosphorus entering the Huron River. By limiting the unnecessary application of phosphorus to lawns, the city can reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the river by 22 percent! To achieve that goal, the City of Ann Arbor passed an ordinance to eliminate the use of phosphorus in manufactured lawn fertilizers, effective January 2007.

Why is phosphorus bad for the Huron River?

During normal watering or rainstorms, unnecessary phosphorus applied to lawns is washed into street stormdrains, which empty directly into local creeks and the Huron River – no filters, no treatment process. Once in the River, the extra phosphorus promotes the rapid growth of algae, which in turn crowds out beneficial water plants. As the algae dies off, the decaying process depletes the water of oxygen, harming fish and insects. If the problem becomes severe enough, lakes become clogged with “pea soup” and scum, and fish kills can result.

If I don't live along the river, why does this matter to me?

The Huron River is the source of up to 90% of the City of Ann Arbor's water supply. The remaining water comes from a series of municipal wells. When you help protect the Huron River, you also help protect the water you use every day for drinking, cooking, bathing, laundry, gardening and other household activities.

Where can I go to get more information?

- For a full copy of the ordinance, please go to www.a2gov.org/green or call the Fertilizer Program Administrator at 734-997-1596.
- Your Washtenaw County MSU Extension office can also help with questions regarding lawn care, phosphorus and soil testing. Call the Master Gardener Hotline at 734-997-1819.
- You can learn more about the Huron River and its tributaries by going to the Huron River Watershed Council's website at www.hrwc.org.



City of
Ann Arbor
Public Services



Huron
River
Watershed
Council

Protecting the river since 1965

1100 N. Main Street Suite 210
Ann Arbor, MI 48104
(734) 769-5123
www.hrwc.org

City of Ann Arbor Phosphorus Ordinance and Lawn Fertilizers

Everything You Need To Know!



What is phosphorus?

Phosphorus is a nutrient that stimulates root growth in plants. Phosphorus is naturally abundant in southeast Michigan soils. The necessary level of phosphorus for healthy plant growth readily affixes to the soil. Plants are very efficient and effective at drawing phosphorus out of the soil.



If we don't need to add phosphorus to our lawns, why is it in fertilizers?

It is one of the three macronutrients plants need, along with potassium and nitrogen. Because most fertilizer is manufactured for national distribution, phosphorus is included in the product regardless of the phosphorus content of the soils in the location of use.

How do I know which fertilizer is okay to apply?

Check the label. On the bag, you will see a series of three numbers. The first number indicates nitrogen, which is used to promote top growth. The middle number indicates phosphorus, which is used for root growth. The last number indicates potassium, for strong stems and disease resistance. To comply with the ordinance, the middle number must read "0" which means there is no phosphorus in the product. In general, check the turf grass fertilizers for zero phosphorus, and avoid "lawn and garden" fertilizers, which are very high in phosphorus.

What is the penalty for applying phosphorus fertilizers?

Each violation of the ordinance will be a civil infraction punishable by a fine up to \$1,000, and not less than \$250.

Is there ever a time when I can apply phosphorus in lawn fertilizer?

The ordinance applies only to manufactured lawn fertilizers containing phosphorus. The following are exempt from the phosphorus ban:

- Garden and tree fertilizers.
- Newly seeded or sodded lawns, limited to the first season of growing or the first four mowings only. (Most landscapers will add phosphorus at the time of seeding or sodding, which should be sufficient.)
- Lawns where a soil test indicates inadequate phosphorus levels. The soil test must demonstrate the level of phosphorus to be less than or equal to 10 parts per million, in which case phosphorus may be applied in the amount and ratio specified by the soil test.



What else do I need to know about the ordinance?

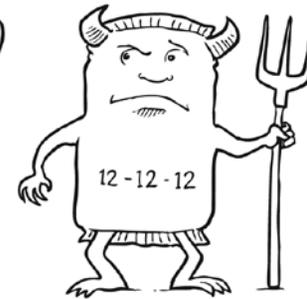
Fertilizer of any type may not be applied:

- On any impervious surfaces (sidewalks, drives, etc.). If fertilizer does spill onto impervious surfaces, you must sweep it up within one hour of the application period.
- Within 25 feet of any wetland, watercourse, stormwater retention or detention basin.
- Within any natural features open space as defined in Chapter 55.
- Prior to April 1 or after November 15.

What else should I know about lawn fertilizers?

Once you have selected the no-phosphorus fertilizer product you prefer, remember:

- Store fertilizer in its original container in a dry, cool place prior to application.
- Fertilizer is an asset to your lawn, but you must be careful to keep it on your lawn and out of the storm drain system. Sweep up any spills immediately, including any granules on sidewalks and driveways. Never apply fertilizer right before a heavy rainstorm. Clean walks with a broom, not a hose. Remember, fertilizer that washes off your yard and into the street enters the stormdrain system, which is a direct connection to local creeks and the Huron River.



- Apply less fertilizer, less often. If you fertilize just once each year, fall is the best time to apply it because it helps your lawn repair itself and prepare for optimal growth in the spring.
- Take proper care of your lawn and you can reduce or eliminate the need for fertilizer. Keep your lawn at least three inches tall, and never cut more than 1/3 of the blade each time you mow. Taller grass has deeper, healthier roots, is more drought tolerant, and prevents weed infestations. When you do cut the grass, mulch the clippings back into your lawn. Mulching adds nitrogen and organic matter, which is necessary to prevent soil compaction.