

FERTILIZER

Fertilizer is any organic (like compost) or inorganic material (bags you buy at a nursery) that supply one or more nutrients essential to plant growth. Fertilizer is always labeled with three bold numbers that represent the amount of nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium (respectively) in the fertilizer. For example, a fertilizer labeled 10-15-10 contains 10% nitrogen, 15% phosphorous, and 10% potassium. According to the NY State DEC the soil in our region is naturally rich in phosphorous, and adding more phosphorous is unnecessary and would contaminate Robinson Pond.

Fertilizer that runs off into lakes and rivers contaminates them. It increases the growth of algae, decreases the amount of oxygen in the water and stresses the fish population. Currently, over 70 bodies of water in New York State are classified as “impaired” due to high levels of phosphorus. These include portions of Lake Champlain, Onondaga Lake, New York City drinking water reservoirs, Lake Ontario, and Robinson Pond.

Because the contamination of fresh water bodies has become such a problem, New York State has passed a law restricting the use of lawn fertilizers beginning in January 1, 2012. Here is an outline of this law:

- Use of fertilizer with a phosphorus content of 0.67% or less is not restricted. This means you may use fertilizer in which the middle number is zero, such as: 15-0-10.
- Application of any fertilizer on lawns or non-agricultural turf is prohibited between December 1st and April 1st.
- Application of any fertilizer on lawns or non-agricultural turf within 20 feet of a water body or on paved surfaces is prohibited.
- Retailers must display phosphorus fertilizer separately from phosphorus-free fertilizer and must post signs notifying customers of the terms of the law.
- Fertilizer with a phosphorous content higher than 0.67% may only be used if a new lawn is being established.

Any person using fertilizers, including a homeowner or anyone a homeowner hires, must comply with the new restrictions.

The new restrictions also apply to use of fertilizer/pesticide combination products, commonly known as “weed and feeds”. The product label must contain 0.67% or less phosphorus.

Although this Law refers only to restrictions of phosphorous, the Lake Committee recommends that homeowners refrain from using any fertilizer on their lawns because the nitrogen in fertilizer also contaminates the lake, and nitrogen levels in Robinson Pond are already high.

❖ NYS DEC web site at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/67239.html>