

## A Healthy Compromise.. A West Virginia Homeowner's Guide to Environmentally Sound Lawn Care



More than **16.6 million people** live in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and it's estimated

that the population will grow to nearly 20 million by 2030. Population growth is a major stressor on the Bay ecosystem.

All of our daily activities, from fertilizing our lawns to driving our cars, have an impact on the environment. As the population in the Bay watershed grows, so do human impacts on the environment. We have to understand that what we do in our backyards influences our local streams and rivers and eventually ends up impacting our downstream neighbors.

This brochure highlights conservation practices that responsible homeowners can apply to home, lawn and garden projects to promote better water quality and a more beautiful backyard.

## Sample Your Soil

**Do yourself a favor and have your soil tested!** This can be done relatively easily and is a free service offered through the West Virginia University Extension Service. Test kits can be picked up at your local Extension or Conservation District office. Soil testing will determine your soil type and amount of fertilizer required to keep your plants healthy and productive. Soil tests should be taken before the planting season. Collecting a good, **representative sample** will ensure accurate analysis.

### Soil Sampling Frequency

- **Vegetable gardens: every year**
- **New lawns: after grading, before seeding**
- **Established lawns, landscaped plants and perennial gardens: every 3 years**

## Fertilizer 101

Fertilizer labels portray 3 numbers indicative of the percentages of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, the three main plant nutrients. Example: a 100 pound bag of 15-10-10 fertilizer contains 15% nitrogen, 10% phosphorous, and 10% potassium. Fertilize only as needed—**Do Not Over-Fertilize.** This leads only to **wasting your time and money** and potentially impacting the health of our streams. Lawn fertilizer

## Fertilizer 101 cont.

is measured in pounds per square feet. To determine your need, multiply the length by the width of the area to be fertilized.

Never fertilize when your lawn is dormant. You want to fertilize when the plant is **actively growing** and can take up the nutrients. Adding nutrients in an environmentally sensitive manner is a good thing in that it will promote a healthy stand of grass and reduce the chance of soil and nutrient runoff. Healthy lawns are less susceptible to disease, insects and weed problems, thus reducing the need for herbicides and pesticides.

## Mowing

The rule of mowing should be to remove **no more than 1/3 of the grass blade** each time you mow.



## Recycle Your Grass Clippings

Consider **leaving your grass clippings** on your lawn after you mow. This allows "recycling of nutrients" and will allow for you to use less nitrogen fertilizer in the future. If clippings are too heavy, rake them up and use in your **compost pile**.

You can help keep our streams clean by recognizing that your actions have direct consequences on our local water quality. Do it for yourself, our streams, the next generation and your lawn!

