

Spring has arrived, help keep the local waterways clean by properly maintaining your lawn.

Lawn maintenance can make your property more beautiful. But what we do to maintain our lawns can affect the environment around us. When it rains, water flows off of our yards, streets, and parking lots directly to our waterways without ever being cleaned.



Fertilizers are essentially nutrients used by plants to live. Most fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium but can contain other elements as well. Just like humans, plants can only use so much food. Fertilizer not used by the plant is available to mix with rain and becomes storm water pollution.

Nutrients from fertilizers, such as phosphorus and nitrogen, promote algae blooms and excessive plant growth. Algae depletes oxygen making it unavailable to fish and other aquatic life. Algae blooms and excessive plants limit much needed sunlight. The following are a few things you can do on your property to keep pollutants out of our waterways.

- **Apply fertilizers exactly where you want them.**
- **Improve the health of your soil by adding compost and using organic mulches.**
- **Use fertilizers and pesticides sparingly.**
- **Leave grass clippings on your lawn as a natural fertilizer.**
- **Avoid applications when rain is forecast.**

Fact or Fiction:

<p><u>Fiction:</u> Grass clippings aren't a problem because they are natural and can biodegrade.</p> <p><u>Fact:</u> As grass clippings and other organic material decompose, the chemical reaction uses available oxygen to produce carbon dioxide. Grass clippings and other organic materials, when introduced to creeks and lakes, remove oxygen from the water which suffocates fish and other aquatic animals. Grass clippings can be left on the lawn to biodegrade.</p>	<p><u>Fiction:</u> Organic fertilizers are not harmful to the environment.</p> <p><u>Fact:</u> All fertilizers have the potential to be harmful when improperly applied. Fertilizers are essentially nutrients that plants need to survive. Whether a fertilizer is organic or synthetic (chemical), if over-applied the excess nutrients can be transported in storm water runoff to nearby creeks and lakes. Organic fertilizers are much more sustainable sources of nutrients, but a soil test will help prescribe the proper amount of fertilizer that should be applied.*</p>	<p><u>Fiction:</u> My yard care habits can't possibly have that much impact on water quality.</p> <p><u>Fact:</u> Research shows that an average 1,000 square foot lawn can generate up to 500 pounds of grass clippings each year. Grass clippings are full of nutrients that have been applied as fertilizer. In a metropolitan area the cumulative impact of our community on the water quality of our creeks and lakes is quite large.</p>
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*: Search <http://extension.psu.edu/plants/master-gardener/counties/montgomery/soil-testing> for information on purchasing a low cost soils testing kit and other helpful information.