

WHY?

Why did Ypsilanti Township ban phosphorus in lawn fertilizer?

The Township is under a federal mandate to reduce phosphorus levels in Ford Lake in order to meet water quality standards.

Runoff from residential lawn fertilization is the primary source of phosphorus entering Ford Lake. By limiting the unnecessary application of phosphorus to lawns, the Township can reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the lake.

To achieve that goal, Ypsilanti Township passed an ordinance to eliminate the use of phosphorus in manufactured lawn fertilizers, effective January 2010.

Why is phosphorus bad for the Huron River and Ford Lake?

During normal watering or rainstorms, unnecessary phosphorus applied to lawns is washed into street storm drains, which empty directly into local creeks, the Huron River and Ford Lake – no filters, no treatment process. Once in the water, 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.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you are concerned that your lawn may not be getting the correct amount of nutrients, you can test your soil.

The Washtenaw County MSU Extension office can help with questions regarding soil testing, lawn care and phosphorus. 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.

PLEASE REMEMBER WATER IS MICHIGAN’S MOST VALUABLE NATURAL RESOURCE AND WE NEED TO PROTECT IT.

To obtain a full copy of the ordinance, please go to www.ytown.org or call the Fertilizer Program Administrator at (734) 484-0073.



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YPSILANTI TOWNSHIP

PHOSPHORUS ORDINANCE PERTAINING TO LAWN FERTILIZERS



**HELPING TO PROTECT OUR
LAKES, RIVERS AND STREAMS**

DID YOU KNOW . . .

1. Using phosphorus fertilizer, in most cases is not necessary and your lawn will not know the difference.
2. Phosphorus stimulates the growth of weeds and algae causing adverse water quality issues in Ford Lake and the Huron River.
3. Phosphorus free fertilizer is less expensive than fertilizer containing phosphorus.

www.ytown.org

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT . . . PHOSPHORUS FERTILIZER AND OUR ORDINANCE

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 that 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, where you will see a series of three numbers. The first number indicates nitrogen used to promote top growth, the middle number indicates phosphorus used for root growth and 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.

Lawn Care Providers . . .

Lawn care providers working in Ypsilanti Township must first register with the Township and, as part of this registration process, service providers agree not to apply phosphorus to lawns. Many commercial applicators already use mixes that do not contain phosphorus.

Penalty for applying phosphorus fertilizers . . .

Each violation of the ordinance will be a municipal civil infraction, punishable by a fine not less than \$250 per incident. The fine for each violation of the ordinance by a commercial applicator, property manager, independent contractor or agent for any of these entities shall be no less than \$500 per incident.

Exception to phosphorus in lawn fertilizer . . .

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

- Newly seeded or sodded lawns, limited to the first season of growing (Most landscapers will add phosphorus at the time of seeding or sodding).
- 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.

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, storm-water retention or detention basin.
- Prior to April 1 or after November 15.

Things to know about lawn fertilizer . . .

Once you have selected a non-phosphorus fertilizer, 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 storm drain system, which is a direct connection to local creeks, Ford Lake 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 recover and prepare for optimal growth in the spring. If you have a lawn care provider, review your application schedule with them and ask about fewer applications.
- 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. Mulching does not cause thatch.