Pennsylvania Urban Nutrient Management - Spring Greening

Spring to Life

As the snow slowly melts away, the birds begin to sing and fresh life bursts from the soil heralding the approach of Spring and the lawn maintenance season.

For the 1 million-plus acres of home lawns in Pennsylvania, selecting and implementing an appropriate lawncare management program to promote healthy and aesthetically pleasing lawns is not only important to homeowners, but is also essential to protecting our waterways.

Know What's Best. Soil Test!

The first step to understanding what your lawn really needs to be lush, healthy, and green is to know what your soil needs. It is important to conduct regular soil tests to determine nutrient deficiencies that should guide fertilizer selection and application. Soil test kits can be purchased for a nominal fee from your local Penn State Extension office.

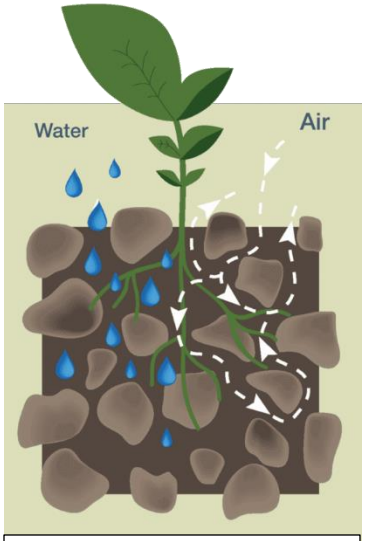
Following soil test recommendations, reading fertilizer label instructions, and using a properly calibrated spreader will ensure the right amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are applied, while reducing nutrient loss and fertilizer cost.

Soil Health. It's the bottom line.

Maintaining a happy, healthy soil is imperative to your lawn's success. Soil is the foundation for your lawn and is home to a multitude of microorganisms that are essential for plant growth. Take the time to support your soil by incorporating some simple practices into your lawn care program. Your lawn and wallet will thank you.

- **Keep it open**. Routine soil aeration can help reduce soil compaction. Good soil structure is essential for proper root growth, healthy microbe communities, and the movement and exchange of water, air, and nutrients.
- **Raise it up.** Maintain a taller lawn by only cutting 1/3 of the grass blade with each mowing. Taller lawns slow runoff and promote deeper roots, which reduces lawn stress and improves soil structure.
- **Put it back.** Return nutrients and organic matter back to the soil by mulching your leaves and grass clippings.

For more soil management strategies, contact your local county conservation district or Penn State Extension office.

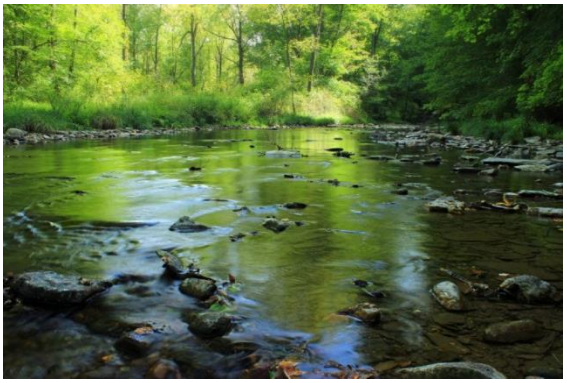


Good soil structure has adequate pore space between soil particles to allow for the movement of air, water, and nutrients into the root zone .

Green Lawns – Clean Streams

Pennsylvania's 2022 Fertilizer Law amendments were developed to protect Pennsylvania waterways and the waterways downstream. As a bonus, following the limitations in the law will boost your bottom line by ensuring that your investment doesn't wash away. The 2022 law established the following nitrogen and phosphorus limits for turf fertilizer applications.

- Nitrogen is limited to 0.9 pounds of total nitrogen and 0.7 pounds of available nitrogen per 1000 ft^2 per application.
- No phosphorus can be applied unless establishing or repairing turf.
- Nitrogen and phosphorus rates can be adjusted based on soil test recommendations and/or if using an enhanced-efficiency fertilizer.



In addition to the nutrient limitations, the law also established application parameters to prevent direct movement of fertilizer nutrients into our streams:

- Do not apply fertilizer if a heavy rain event is expected.
- Keep fertilizer away from drainage ditches, storm drains, or water.
    - Maintain a 15-foot buffer from the banks of all waterways.
- Remove fertilizer that lands on impervious surfaces (driveways, sidewalks, roads, parking lots).

Working Together for Clean Water

With ever growing acres of managed turf in Pennsylvania, controlling what goes into PA waterways is ALL of our responsibility. Help protect Pennsylvania's waterways by being wise when you fertilize!

For more information on the Pennsylvania Fertilizer Law, visit the Department of Agriculture's website at agriculture.pa.gov/fertilizer or contact Denise Uzupis at duzupis@pa.gov.

The Environmental Advisory Committee Recommends:

Lawn grass should be mowed to no less than 3.5 inches in height to make it more sustainable to heat and drought, and to allow roots to grow deeper which reduces the rate of discharge from stormwater runoff.