

Nine Lawn Management Steps to Protect the Salt Ponds



Salt Ponds
Coalition



Lawn fertilizers contain nitrogen, which is needed to make the grass green. If too much fertilizer is added to the lawn, the grass plants may not be able to use all the nitrogen. Some of the unused nitrogen may dissolve in the groundwater that flows into the ponds or wash off in storms. Excess nitrogen in the salt ponds can result in fish kills and smelly, unsightly water. Almost all fish in our area are dependant on the salt ponds for food and/or habitat during part of their life cycle. Protecting the ponds is in everyone's best interest.

To maintain an attractive lawn, yet protect the water quality of the ponds, consider taking the following steps:

- Use organic fertilizer or low-soluble inorganic fertilizer. This approach maximizes the amount of fertilizer-delivered nitrogen that the grass plant can use.
- Use a mulching mower and leave clippings on the lawn. You can cut your fertilizer need in half by “recycling” the nitrogen in the grass clippings back into the turf.
- Fertilize established lawns once or twice per year. Apply fertilizer in late spring and again in the fall. If turf quality and density is acceptable, it may be possible to reduce the fertilizer frequency to one time a year.
- Add no more than one pound of nitrogen per application for each 1,000 square feet of lawn area. Lawn fertilizer bags list the amount of square footage coverage provided by the fertilizer in that bag, based on adding one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- Stop adding fertilizer after early-November. Nitrogen in late fall applications is not taken up by the roots and may end up moving with groundwater to the ponds.
- Reduce the amount of fertilizer applied to lawns that are ten years or older. As the lawn ages, it needs less nitrogen from fertilizer.
- Reduce excessive irrigation of lawns. Excessive irrigation increases the risk that some of nitrogen may move into the groundwater system. It also raises the risk of grass diseases.
- Shift to fescue grasses. These grasses require less nitrogen and water. Consider turf-type tall fescues, dwarf tall fescues, and the fine-leaf fescues (creeping red, Chewings, sheep, and hard).
- Clean up fertilizer that gets applied to roads, sidewalks, patios and other hard surfaces. Fertilizer left on these surfaces will flow off site with the rain water - often into storm drains and creeks.

Additional landscape management approaches

Consider reducing the amount of lawn by allowing some areas to revert to natural vegetation, or by planting vegetated buffers with native plants or field grasses. This reduces the amount of lawn fertilizer required. What is more, buffers reduce runoff leaving the property, provide habitat for birds and other animals, and, at pond side, discourage nuisance flocks of Canada Geese.