UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Family, Home & Garden Education Center
practical solutions to everyday questions
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Low Input Lawn Care

14 ways you can protect the environment

1) If an unfertilized lawn is considered acceptable, then don't fertilize.

2) If you decide to fertilize, set a target maximum rate of 2 lbs N/1000 sq. ft. /year on established lawns of 10 years or more. Newly seeded turf, especially on new home sites where the topsoil has been removed, may require more fertilizer until the turf is well established (probably the first 1-2 years).

Example
20-5-20 purchased as a 40lb bag
%20 x 40 = 8 lbs. of N
One bag will cover 4,000 sq ft lawn for the season.

3) Mow as high as you can (leaf blades should be at least 3 inches long when you finish mowing). Return clippings to the lawn. Clippings supply a slow-release source of nitrogen to the lawn and allow for reduced fertilizer applications.

4) Consider introducing white clover or other low-growing legumes into your lawn to naturally provide nitrogen.

5) Avoid using combination products that include fertilizers and pesticides (weed and feed, etc.).

6) If you water your lawn, apply a total amount of 1 inch of water a week. This includes rain water and irrigation water. Over watering can lead to leaching of nitrogen into groundwater. Use a rain gauge or tin can to measure precipitation. Also, watering early in the day allows the leaf blades to completely dry, helping to prevent disease problems.

7) Get your soil tested:
•If a soil test indicates that P and/or K are adequate, there is no need to apply these and only nitrogen may be necessary.
•In this case, fertilizers that contain only nitrogen are preferable to blended N-P-K fertilizers.

8) If only blended fertilizers are available, choose the one with the lowest amount of phosphorus. Excess phosphorus can lead to algae blooms. If you decide to fertilize, don't apply fertilizer in the spring before your grass greens up and apply fertilizer for the last time no later than mid-September. Avoid fertilizing in mid-summer. This will insure that your lawn is growing rapidly enough to use all of the applied fertilizer.

9) If fertilizing, slow-release formulations are preferable to soluble, fast-release (synthetic formulations).

10) If a synthetic fertilizer is used, apply one-half to one-third (or less) of the rate recommended on the fertilizer bag label, then monitor lawn response. Reapply at the reduced rate only when the appearance of the lawn starts to decline (lawn begins to yellow a bit).

11) Topdress your lawn surface with compost or other organic matter to raise the organic matter content or your soil to at least 3%-5%. The amount of organic matter in your soil can be determined with a soil test. Apply only ¼ inch of OM per application, and a total of only ½ inch per year.

12) Choose grasses such as fescues that require less nutrient and water inputs.

13) Maintain soil pH levels between 6.0 and 6.5. Soil pH can be determined by a soil test.

14) If you decide to fertilize, leave a buffer strip of unfertilized grasses or other vegetation around water bodies, i.e., streams, rivers, lakes, estuaries, bays, coastal areas, vernal pools, wetlands or drainage areas, etc. Do not apply any product except limestone within 25 feet of the high water mark.