

Lawn Care

Many Marylanders desire expanses of lush, green, weed-free lawn as a part of their landscape. This desire for perfection, besides being time-consuming, has led to a greater use of chemicals to encourage growth and eliminate weeds, insects, and diseases. The result is excess applications of fertilizer, herbicides, insecticides, and fungicides, which contributes to an increase in contaminants in our ground and surface water.

According to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, there are over 685,000 acres of residential lawns in Maryland. Of that, 675,000 acres surround single family homes, and the remaining 10,000 acres surround townhomes. If everyone overfertilized their lawn by just 1 pound, a huge amount of contaminants could end up in our groundwater, streams, rivers, lakes, and the Chesapeake Bay.

Problems:

- # Excess nitrogen, phosphorus, and, in some cases, pesticides are found in our groundwater and the Chesapeake Bay.
- # Water is sometimes in short supply, especially during periods of summer drought.

Solutions:

- # Have soil tested to determine the amount of fertilizer and lime needed. Apply according to recommendations. (Contact your local Maryland Cooperative Extension office for soil testing information.)
- # When fertilizing, keep granules off paved areas by sweeping them back onto the grass.
- # Apply recommended fertilizer in the fall by using a predominately slow-release Water Insoluble Nitrogen (WIN).
- # Leave grass clippings on the lawn to reduce the amount of fertilizer needed, or compost grass clippings with brush, dried leaves, and other garden materials.
- # Practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Identify the pest and its effect before selecting the appropriate treatment least harmful to you and the environment.
- # Mow at appropriate height to maintain a healthy lawn.
- # Let nature take its course. It is natural for some grasses (cool season grasses) to turn brown during summer drought. Even without supplemental water, they will become green again in the fall. Allow cool season grasses to naturally go into their summer dormant period, or water slowly and thoroughly to prevent runoff (about 1 inch per week).
- # Use drought-tolerant grasses recommended for this zone.

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