

TEN SIMPLE STEPS TOWARD A SAFE & HEALTHY LAWN:

1. Do a soil test to determine whether or not any supplements (potassium, phosphorus, etc.) are needed. Soil test kits are available at nurseries, Ace Hardware, Town Hall, and the Police Department. (There is a small fee when you send in your sample to be analyzed.) If you must fertilize, use slow or time-release fertilizer products if at all possible, and only in the fall on established lawns.
2. Avoid the use of phosphorus unless indicated by the soil test, or when establishing a new lawn from seed. Lawns rarely need anything more than nitrogen, if that.
3. Check weather conditions before applying any fertilizer, and do not fertilize if rain is predicted (or if the ground is saturated). Use only slow or timed release nitrogen (10-0-0 on the bag). Water in lightly – no more than ¼ to ½ inch.
4. Contrary to popular belief, spring is not the best time to fertilize. At that time, nitrogen will encourage top growth at the expense of root growth, and will also encourage germination of weed seeds. If fertilizer is applied, it is best done between late August and Columbus Day. Instead, rake, de-thatch or aerate your lawn in the spring to help stimulate healthy growth and then overseed with a tall or fine fescue mix.
5. Mow your lawn in the spring when it reaches 3” or more and leave the clippings on the lawn. They’re a great source of nitrogen rich free fertilizer. Cutting higher reduces weed invasion (especially crabgrass), creates a deeper root system and helps the lawn recover faster from drought, so make 3” the norm.
6. Leave at least a 25’ buffer zone of untreated grass or other vegetation around any wells, wetlands, streams, coastal areas or other water bodies.
7. Know the size of your lawn. Strictly follow package directions and never exceed the maximum amount to be applied. Over-application of any fertilizer or pesticide, even organic products, can have a negative impact on the watershed, causing algae blooms that deplete oxygen and suffocate marine life. Never leave fertilizer, weed or insect controls on asphalt, concrete or other impervious surfaces. Sweep them back into the lawn or dispose of them according to label directions.
8. Water wisely and infrequently. If absolutely necessary, deeply soak the lawn once or twice a week with about 1” of water. Deep watering encourages strong root growth, while frequent light watering increases the potential for harmful pesticide or fertilizer runoff and encourages thatch buildup.
9. To minimize weeds, regularly overseed your lawn with fine or tall fescues, white clover and other grasses appropriate for this climate. Maximum density minimizes weeds.
10. Manage pest problems with spot applications. Don’t broadcast pesticides like grub and crabgrass control or weed and feed. Pesticides can be toxic if overused or carelessly applied, and long term effects on health are unknown. Look for biological, mechanical or physical ways to control pests instead of pesticides. Grass grown on healthy soils which is properly mown will seldom have pest problems.