

# How To Fertilize Your Lawn Responsibly

## It's All in the Bag



### Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Law In a Nutshell

Maryland's lawn fertilizer law helps protect the Chesapeake Bay from excess nutrients entering its waters from lawns and other managed grassy areas. If you fertilize your lawn yourself, here's what you need to know and do to prevent excess nutrients from washing off your property and into storm drains, streams, and rivers that feed the Bay.

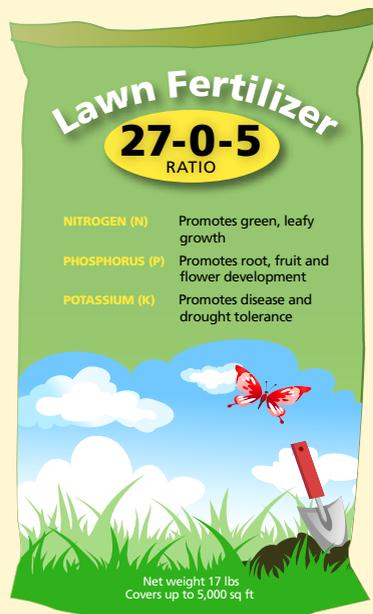
- Do not over-fertilize. Follow University of Maryland fertilizer recommendations at [extension.umd.edu/hgic](http://extension.umd.edu/hgic).
- A single fertilizer application may not exceed 0.9 pound total nitrogen per 1,000 square feet which can include no more than 0.7 pound of soluble nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. For seasonal and yearly fertilizer rates, visit [extension.umd.edu/hgic](http://extension.umd.edu/hgic). Search for **HG 112**.
- Most Maryland lawns have sufficient phosphorus. Do not apply phosphorus to lawns unless a soil test shows that your soil is in the low to medium range or you are establishing or renovating your lawn.
- Keep fertilizer applications 10 to 15 feet from waterways.
- Fertilizer applications are prohibited between November 15 and March 1.
- Do not fertilize when the ground is frozen or if heavy rain is predicted.
- Do not use fertilizers to de-ice walkways and driveways.
- If fertilizer lands on an impervious surface, sweep it back onto the grass or clean it up.

### How to Read a Fertilizer Label

All fertilizer products are labeled with three numbers separated by dashes that represent the percent by weight of the three most important plant nutrients:

- Nitrogen (N)** — Promotes green, leafy growth
- Phosphorus (P)** — Promotes root, fruit and flower development
- Potassium (K)** — Promotes disease and drought tolerance

These numbers are always displayed in the same order. A 17 lb bag of 27-0-5 fertilizer contains 27 percent N, 0 percent P (as required by Maryland law) and 5 percent K. The weight of the fertilizer bag and the amount of area covered by the product are listed on the fertilizer label. Look for this information so that you will know how much fertilizer to buy.



*Read the fertilizer label for important information about the contents of the bag.*



### Calculate Your Lawn's Square Footage

Calculate the area of your lawn to determine how much fertilizer to buy. Do not buy more fertilizer than you need and always read and follow label instructions.

To calculate your lawn's square footage, multiply your lawn's length by its width. Next, subtract the areas not to be fertilized such as the house, deck, driveway and garden. The remaining area is the square footage of your lawn.

#### Example

Total Lot Size:	130 ft x 50 ft = 6,500 sq ft
Subtract:	
House:	25 ft x 30 ft = 750 sq ft
Deck:	10 ft x 15 ft = 150 sq ft
Driveway:	40 ft x 10 ft = 400 sq ft
Garden:	10 ft x 20 ft = 200 sq ft
Total Area to Subtract:	1,500 sq ft
Total Lawn Area:	5,000 sq ft

## Fertilize at the Right Time

To prevent runoff, fertilizer should only be applied to lawns when the grass is actively growing. Fertilize warm season grasses (Bermudagrass and Zoysiagrass) in late spring or summer and cool season grasses (fescues, bluegrass) in fall, based on soil test results. Do not exceed single and yearly application limits.

Nitrogen Fertilizer Guide by Turf Type							
Grass	September	October	Late May	Early June	July	August	Maximum Yearly
Tall fescue	0.9 lb	0.9 lb	0.5-0.9 lb <i>if needed</i>		—	—	2.7 lbs
Kentucky bluegrass	0.9 lb	0.9 lb	0.5-0.9 lb <i>if needed</i>		—	—	2.7 lbs
Fine fescue	—	0.9 lb	0.5 lb	—	—	—	1.4 lbs
Bermudagrass	—	—	—	0.9 lb	0.5-0.9 lb <i>if needed</i>		2.7 lbs
Zoysiagrass	—	—	—	0.9 lb	0.5-0.9 lb <i>if needed</i>		1.8 lbs

## Don't Over-Fertilize

Fertilizer products sold in Maryland are labeled to ensure that no more than 0.9 pound of total nitrogen is applied per 1,000 square feet in a single application. Simply follow the directions on the fertilizer bag to comply with Maryland's fertilizer limits. For quick reference, the chart on the right shows common lawn fertilizer formulations and the amount of fertilizer needed to supply an application rate of 0.9 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet or a lighter application of 0.5 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

Numbers on fertilizer bag	Amount of fertilizer needed to supply 0.9 lb of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft	Amount of fertilizer needed to supply 0.5 lb of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft
6-0-0	15 lbs	8.3 lbs
10-0-4	9 lbs	5 lbs
15-0-6	6 lbs	3.3 lbs
20-0-5	4.5 lbs	2.5 lbs
30-0-3	3 lbs	1.7 lbs
35-0-5	2.5 lbs	1.4 lbs

To manually calculate pounds of fertilizer to apply, use this formula:

$$\frac{\text{Desired rate of N in lbs (e.g., 0.9 lb)}}{\text{First number on fertilizer bag (expressed as a decimal)}} = \frac{\text{Lbs needed to fertilize 1,000 sq ft}}{1,000 \text{ sq ft}}$$

## Apply Fertilizer Properly

Never apply fertilizer by hand. Use a drop or rotary spreader to apply fertilizer evenly to your lawn and always keep fertilizer applications 10 to 15 ft from waterways. To prevent striping, overlap wheel tracks of the drop spreader. Spread half of the fertilizer in a north-south direction and the other half in an east-west direction. Always check the fertilizer product for recommended spreader settings.

## Mow to the Right Height

- Mow the grass high to shade out weeds and conserve moisture.
- Remove no more than 1/3 of the grass height each time you mow.
- Sharpen your lawnmower blade in spring.

Mowing Heights		
Turf Type	Spring & Summer	Fall
Tall fescue	2½ - 3½ inches	2½ inches
Kentucky bluegrass	2½ - 3½ inches	2 - 2½ inches
Fine fescue	2½ - 3½ inches	2½ inches
Bermudagrass	1½ - 2 inches	1½ - 2 inches
Zoysiagrass	1½ - 2 inches	1½ - 2 inches

## More Tips

- Leave grass clippings on the lawn. They provide free slow-release fertilizer.
- Let established lawns go dormant during the hot, dry summer months.
- If you must water (and watering is not prohibited due to drought conditions) do so in the early morning using a sprinkler.
- Footprints and a blue-grey appearance are signs that your lawn is thirsty.
- Water slowly; wet to a depth of 4 to 6 inches.
- Avoid water run-off from the lawn.
- Light, frequent watering or watering in the evening can damage your lawn.

**TIP:** Place a container on the lawn during irrigation. When one inch of water is collected, you can turn off the sprinkler.



Maryland  
Department of Agriculture  
Office of Resource Conservation  
[mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer](http://mda.maryland.gov/fertilizer)

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