

Fertilizing properly will help your lawn and the environment

Spring is almost here and soon lawns and landscapes will need some extra tender loving care in the form of fertilizers. Like most things in life, fertilizer can be very useful if used properly. A little time, education and effort on your part can not only make your yard greener and healthier, it can help the environment.

Plant nutrition dates to the 19th century. Justus von Liebig (12 May 1803 – 18 April 1873) made huge strides regarding fertilizers and is actually known as the “father of the fertilizer industry.” He made major contributions to the agricultural and biological fields. A German chemist and professor, Liebig devised the modern laboratory-oriented teaching method, and for such innovations, he is regarded as one of the greatest chemistry teachers of all time. (Wikipedia) He is credited for discovering nitrogen as a necessary plant nutrient.

Today, fertilizer would seem to be a magical combination of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and other nutrients. It is designed to make lawns green and healthy by supplementing nutrients in the soil. When fertilizer is applied correctly, it can indeed help with growth, pest and environmental damage, reduction of weeds and replacement of nutrients. But did you know that if fertilizer is used incorrectly it can do quite a bit of damage to the environment?

According to the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD), “recent studies reveal that rising nitrite levels in many local water bodies can be traced to fertilizer. Nitrate is a form of nitrogen that is found in inorganic fertilizers. When fertilizer is required and applied correctly, the lawn absorbs the nitrogen. However, fertilizers applied improperly can run off lawns and into local water bodies, harming water quality and threatening the plants and animals that depend on clean water for survival.”

To assist with this ever increasing challenge, the SWFWMD has started a campaign to focus on Florida-Friendly fertilizing tips. By visiting their website at [WaterMatters.org/fertilizing](http://WaterMatters.org/fertilizing), citizens can get helpful information on proper fertilizing techniques. The website even offers videos for those that don't want to read!

Some of the steps they offer are:

- Testing your soil. Many soils already have the necessary amount of one or more of the required nutrients for plants. If you were to test your soil and find it high in phosphorus, then you would need to buy a fertilizer with little or no phosphorus content.
- Know when to apply fertilizer. The proper time to apply fertilizer is when the grass is growing. When applied to dormant lawns and plants, the nutrients simply aren't necessary and wastes time and money. In fact, it actually harms the environment by running off or leaching through the soil and entering near by bodies of water.
- Choose slow-release fertilizer. The lawn will benefit by a longer lasting nutrient release and fewer nutrients will be wasted.

Other tips include proper application, what type of fertilizers to buy, how to water-in fertilizer and many more helpful ideas. By fertilizing properly, not only are you going to save time and money, you will actually be helping the environment and keeping the nearby water bodies clean and healthy.

Take some time to visit SWFWMD's website. All the information is free and if followed, the instructions just may save you plenty of cash and make your yard the envy of neighborhood.