

Keeping Our Waterways Healthy by Taryn Sudol

New fertilizer ordinance approved in Seminole County

Great news! Seminole County is moving forward to protect our waterways. Effective on February 28, 2017, the Board of County Commissioners approved a new Fertilizer Ordinance that regulates fertilizers containing nitrogen and/or phosphorous and provides specific management guidelines to minimize the negative impacts to our natural waterbodies. As residents, we should all do our part to keep our waterways healthy.

Our waterways are most commonly impaired from too much nitrogen and phosphorus in the water. These excess nutrients lead to an overgrowth of algae and nuisance weeds.

To learn more, the State sampled the Wekiva River Basin to study where these nutrients came from, and found that about half of the amount of nitrogen comes from different fertilizers in our landscape, including what residents use in their yards, such as lawn fertilizers.

While you want to make sure you feed your grass and have a healthy yard, it's important to prevent these nutrients from entering the water system.



Here are a few key points outlined in the Fertilizer Ordinance

- You can no longer use fertilizers that contain nitrogen or phosphorus between June 1 and September 30. During the rainy season, it is very likely that fertilizers will run off into the waterways. Residents can use a "summer blend" that contains iron and other micronutrients.
- It is recommended to fertilize in April and October. In April, grass roots are developing and can use a boost. In October, you may want to apply a fertilizer with equal parts nitrogen and potassium. The potassium will help the roots survive the winter.
- During winter, mild as it can be, grass slows its growth and its root system is reduced. A sparse root system cannot absorb much fertilizer. Applying fertilizer when grass is dormant is not recommended.
- Keep in mind that different types of turf grass need different amounts of fertilizer. St. Augustine and Zoysia grass typically look good with two pounds of nitrogen each year (apply one pound per 1,000 square feet with each application). Meanwhile, Bahia grass is fine with only one pound of fertilizer each year and usually looks good without any fertilizer!
- If you decide to fertilize, you need to use fertilizers with slow-release nitrogen and no phosphorus. Florida soils generally have enough phosphorus so you don't need to apply any more. A slow-release nitrogen product releases nitrogen from the fertilizer over a long period of time. Plant roots are able to use the nitrogen as it is released. It lasts longer so you need to apply it less often.
- Look for fertilizers that have 50 percent or more slow-release nitrogen. You'll have to look at the fertilizer label to determine this. See if the percent that is slow-release nitrogen is half of the total nitrogen. Check out our fertilizer calculator at seminolecountyfl.gov/fertilizer to determine if the fertilizer you're looking at is slow-release and how much of it you need for your yard.
- A few other things to remember: keep your grass clippings off sidewalks and roadways. Never let them blow down the drain. Do not fertilize within 15 feet of a waterway. Clean up any fertilizer spills.

We all have to fertilize appropriately to improve our water quality. It's Seminole County's Natural Choice! For more information, visit seminolecountyfl.gov/fertilizer.



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