

# Lawn Fertilizing

## A good nutrient supply is important for a healthy, vigorously growing lawn.

Lawns that are discolored, slow-growing, or have weeds or other pest problems may not be properly fertilized. Lawn fertilizers usually supply three main nutrients: nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. However, nitrogen is the only nutrient that turfgrass needs on a regular basis. Too much or improperly applied fertilizer can injure lawns and may contribute to water pollution through runoff.

## When fertilizing your lawn:

- ◆ Identify the type of grass you have and select the proper fertilizer rate and application timing.
- ◆ Use appropriate application equipment.
- ◆ Deeply water the day before you apply fertilizer.
- ◆ After fertilizing, irrigate just enough to wash the fertilizer off the leaves and into the soil.
- ◆ Keep fertilizer off walkways and bare areas. Only apply fertilizer to planted areas where it can be taken up by plant roots.
- ◆ Apply fertilizers only at times when grass is actively growing and no more than recommended rates.
- ◆ Use slow-release fertilizers to minimize leaching.
- ◆ Avoid the use of fertilizer/pesticide combinations unless the presence of the pest coincides with a scheduled fertilization.

## How much fertilizer should you use?

- ◆ Fertilizer application depends on turf species, varying from 2 to 4 pounds of actual nitrogen/year per 1,000 square feet, and is usually divided into 3 to 4 applications per year.
- ◆ Usually, no more than 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet should be applied at one time.
- ◆ To calculate the proper rate for your situation, use the fertilizer calculator on the UC Guide to Healthy Lawns: [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF).
- ◆ Adjust your spreader according to manufacturer instructions.
- ◆ Use a mulching mower. Grass clippings left on the lawn after mowing will re-release valuable nutrients back to the soil so you can use less fertilizer.

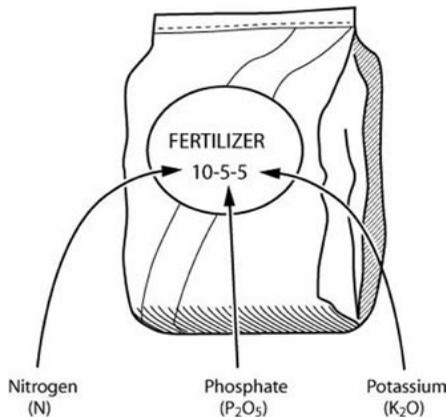


## Prevent fertilizer from polluting waterways.

- ◆ Before watering, sweep any fertilizer on sidewalks, walkways, or driveways back onto lawns—not into the street gutter and storm drains.
- ◆ Avoid overwatering to prevent fertilizer and water from running into gutters.
- ◆ Use drop spreaders rather than rotary spreaders to avoid off-target fertilizer application.

**For more information on fertilizing, watering and other lawn care practices, refer to the UC Guide to Healthy Lawns:**

[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/TOOLS/TURF).



### How to read a fertilizer label

The numbers on a fertilizer bag indicate the percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub>), and potash (K<sub>2</sub>O) in fertilizer, written as N-P-K.

**Minimize the use of pesticides that pollute our waterways. Use nonchemical alternatives or less toxic pesticide products whenever possible. Read product labels carefully and follow instructions on proper use, storage, and disposal.**

For more information about managing pests, contact your **University of California Cooperative Extension office** listed under the county government pages of your phone book or the UC IPM Web site at [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu).



University of California  
Cooperative Extension

**What you use in your landscape affects our rivers and oceans!**

Text developed through a grant from CA SWRCB and the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.