

# Help Protect and Preserve Water Quality in Michigan

## Use Phosphorus Free Fertilizer

Beginning January 1, 2012, Michigan law restricts phosphorus fertilizer applications on lawns.



[www.michigan.gov/mda-fertilizer](http://www.michigan.gov/mda-fertilizer)

### The Phosphorus Law

Michigan Fertilizer Law (1994 PA 451, Part 85, Fertilizers) restricts the use of phosphorus fertilizers on residential and commercial lawns, including athletic fields and golf courses statewide. Both homeowners and commercial applicators must follow the phosphorus application restrictions.

### What fertilizers do I use?

Look for lawn fertilizers with zero phosphorus in them. On the bag or box of fertilizer is a row of three numbers. These numbers indicate the amount of total nitrogen (N), available phosphate ( $P_2O_5$ ) and soluble potash ( $K_2O$ ) in the particular product. The middle number is available phosphate and should read "0."



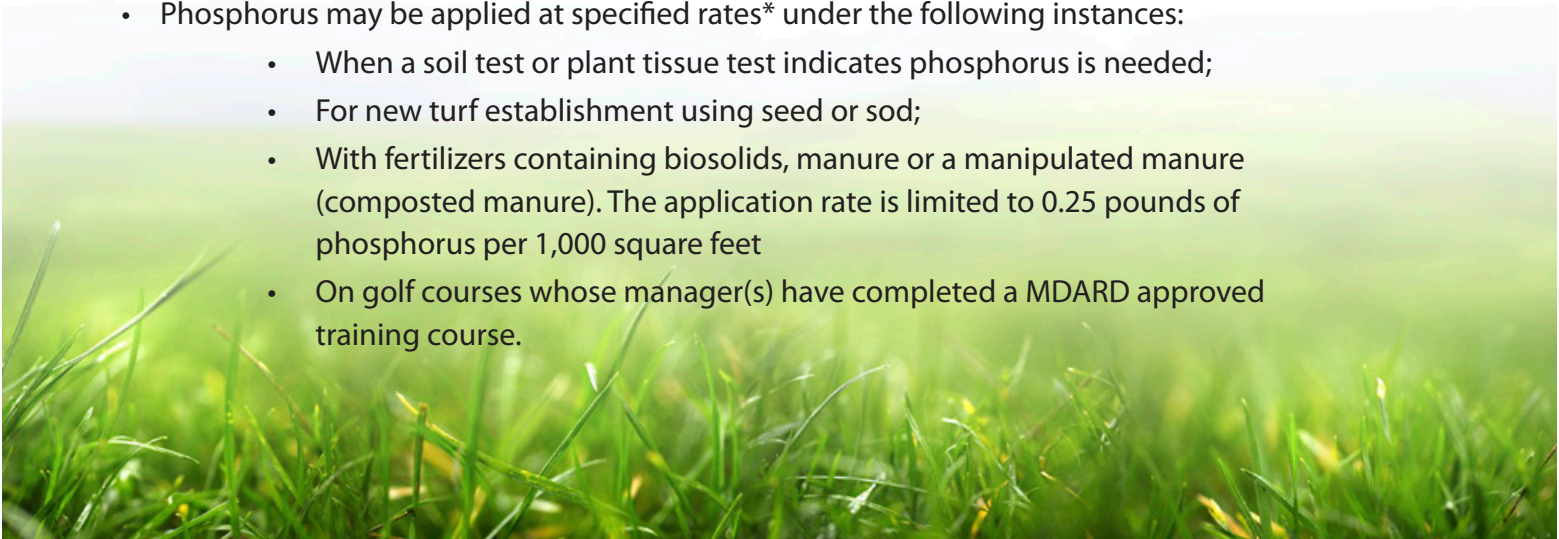
### Where can I find phosphorus free fertilizers?

A majority of garden centers, hardware stores, and large chain stores carry phosphorus free lawn fertilizers.

### Are there any instances when I can apply phosphorus?

The general rule in the Michigan Fertilizer Law is that no phosphorus fertilizer may be applied on lawns. However, there are a couple of exceptions:

- Phosphorus applications for agriculture, gardens and tree and shrubs are not included.
- Phosphorus may be applied at specified rates\* under the following instances:
  - When a soil test or plant tissue test indicates phosphorus is needed;
  - For new turf establishment using seed or sod;
  - With fertilizers containing biosolids, manure or a manipulated manure (composted manure). The application rate is limited to 0.25 pounds of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet
  - On golf courses whose manager(s) have completed a MDARD approved training course.



## Protecting Water Quality

Phosphorus is a naturally occurring essential nutrient for plant and animal growth. It is also a primary water quality concern in Michigan. When excess phosphorus is applied on land, it may run into nearby lakes, rivers and streams. This runoff can lead to increased algae and aquatic plant growth which can have negative effects on water quality, fisheries, recreation, and property values. By restricting unnecessary phosphorus applications, the phosphorus law will help maintain and protect Michigan's vast water resources.



*Phosphorus runoff can have negative effects on water quality, fisheries and recreation. A vegetative buffer, as seen above, is one way to reduce these effects.*

## Where can I get my soil tested?

Most Michigan soils have adequate phosphorus levels and do not require continual applications of phosphorus. Before fertilizing, conduct a soil test to determine whether your lawn needs phosphorus. Instructions and test kits are available through Michigan State University Extension by going to:

**[www.msusoiltest.com](http://www.msusoiltest.com)**

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY** | Extension

*Turf food bag illustration and "Sweep it up!" photo were provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Dakota County, Minnesota*

## Clean Up and Avoid Water

- Fertilizer cannot be applied to frozen soil or soil saturated with water.
- Any fertilizer released onto a hard surface, such as a sidewalk or driveway, must be cleaned up promptly.
- Maintain at least a 15' application buffer from surface water (lake, river, stream).
- If a spreader guard, deflector shield, or drop spreader is used, then maintain at least a 3' buffer.
- If a continuous natural vegetative buffer separates the turf and surface water, then maintain at least a 10' buffer from the water.



*Sweep it up! Fertilizer and clippings left on streets and sidewalks can be a major contributor to phosphorus loads in lakes and rivers.*

## Additional Information

**[www.BePhosphorusSmart.msu.edu](http://www.BePhosphorusSmart.msu.edu)**

**Be Phosphorus Smart!**

