

DEC launches "Look for the Zero" campaign to urge homeowners to purchase phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer - <http://www.dec.ny.gov/press/press.html>

To protect water quality this spring, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) today is urging New Yorkers to practice sustainable lawn care by going phosphorus free, using native plants and grasses, and reducing fertilizer use. DEC has launched the "Look for the Zero" campaign to encourage New Yorkers to purchase phosphorus-free lawn fertilizer, as more than 100 water bodies in New York State cannot be used or enjoyed as a result of too much phosphorus.

"The actions New Yorkers take in their backyards can have a big impact on the environment. By choosing sustainable lawn care, homeowners are helping protect water quality and public health," **said DEC Commissioner Basil Seggos.** "Excess phosphorous is causing problems in many New York waterbodies, making them unusable for swimming, fishing, or as a source of drinking water. I urge residents to 'look for the zero' and buy phosphorous-free fertilizer this spring. By eliminating phosphorus and reducing pesticide use on lawns, New Yorkers can play an important role in addressing water quality impairments across the state."

New York's nutrient runoff law prohibits the use of phosphorus lawn fertilizers unless a new lawn is being established or a soil test shows that the lawn does not have enough phosphorus.

Generally, only newly established lawns or those with poor soil need phosphorus. Phosphorus applied to lawns that don't need it will not be used and can cause water pollution. Regardless of the location, excess phosphorus from lawns can wash off and pollute lakes and streams, harming fish and ruining boating and swimming.

Consumers should review bag labels for phosphorus content when shopping for fertilizer. Fertilizer labels have three bold numbers. The number in the middle is the percentage of phosphorus in the product, such as: 22-0-15. The state's law requires retailers to display phosphorus fertilizer separately from phosphorus-free fertilizer and post signs notifying customers of the terms of the law.

Homeowners have several options to practice more sustainable lawn care. DEC encourages homeowners to choose native plants and grasses, which are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions. These plant species provide nectar, pollen, and seeds that serve as food for native butterflies, insects, birds, and other animals.

Organic lawn care can easily be implemented on any lawn. Safe and effective alternatives exist for most chemical pesticides and fertilizers. Organic lawn care treatments promote deep root systems, natural photosynthesis, and longer grass growth. Visit DEC's [Sustainable Landscaping](#) web page to learn more.

Additional recommendations for sustainable lawn care include spreading a quarter inch of compost on the lawn to improve moisture retention and soil texture and add beneficial microorganisms and nutrients. Another suggestion is to allow grass to grow to three inches and then cut no more than one inch off the top. This is the "one-third" rule and helps to develop a deeper root system, which is a natural defense against weeds, disease and drought. Visit DEC's [Lawn Care](#) web page for more information.

DEC also encourages homeowners to leave lawn clippings on the yard in order to improve the health of the lawn. Grass clippings are 80 percent water and contain 2- 4 percent nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and other nutrients. Leaving clippings also saves homeowners time while mowing and reduces the amount of garbage thrown out. Grass clippings can account for as much as 10 percent of garbage.

DEC has posted a new video ("[Look for Zero Phosphorus Lawn Fertilizer](#)") (link leaves DEC's website) to its YouTube channel that shows how phosphorus and other chemicals can run off lawns and enter our waterways. For more information, visit DEC's [Lawn Fertilizer](#) web page.

The nutrient runoff law does not affect agricultural fertilizer or fertilizer for gardens.