

# LAWNCARE TIPS FOR SHORELINE PROPERTY OWNERS



## Lawncare Tips for Shoreline Property Owners

To many people a yard without a lawn is not a yard. Lawns provide play areas for children and sports like croquet. A lawn's open space is ideal for enjoying the sun and outdoor dining or entertaining.

But aren't there water quality problems with having a lawn in a shoreline area? Yes, in fact, there are. The same nutrients that promote a lush green lawn can promote lush green growth of aquatic plants and algae in a lake. Studies on some lakes have indicated that lawn fertilization is one of the largest sources of human-induced pollution. Although nutrient pollution can be minimized by carefully managing fertilizer application or not fertilizing at all, the very existence of a lawn which extends to the water's edge causes other types of problems, such as near shore habitat destruction, increased overland runoff to the water, and weakened shoreline soils increasing the likelihood of erosion.

Lawns are not a natural landscape feature and generally require high maintenance. You can still have a lawn on a shoreline property and protect water quality, especially if the area adjacent to the shoreline has natural vegetation. This brochure provides some tips on how you can manage your lawn without impacting the lake's water quality.

### Guidelines for Shoreline Lawn Care

If you do choose a lawn as your preferred landscape option for your yard, follow these guidelines to minimize your impact on surface waters:

#### Natural Vegetation

Maintain natural vegetation along the shoreline. Maintaining natural vegetation with trees, shrubs, and ground cover can preserve water quality, enhance aesthetics, and protect your property from shoreline erosion. (For more information on establishing natural vegetation refer to the Watershed Council's Lakescaping brochure.)

### Fertilizing Tips

Before applying fertilizer, test your soil to determine which nutrients, if any, are needed. Soil testing is available through your local Michigan State University (MSU) Extension office for under \$10. MSU will return test results with fertilizer recommendations.

If fertilizer is necessary, be sure you're fertilizing only the lawn and not the lake! Use the smallest amount of fertilizer possible to maintain good grass cover. In the spring, use small amounts of a slow release form of nitrogen. This method allows the grass to use the nitrogen and remain vigorous while minimizing the amount of nutrients entering the water. If the lawn is not growing well, apply a very small amount of nitrogen early in the summer. Try not to apply fertilizer before a rain.

Do not use a fertilizer containing phosphorus unless a soil test indicates a need for it. Phosphorus is the most critical nutrient in lakes and streams in northern Michigan. Even a small amount of phosphorus added to a lake or stream can stimulate excessive growth of aquatic plants and algae.

### Lawn Cover

If you are establishing a lawn, plant a fescue mixture rather than bluegrass. Fescue requires much less nitrogen per square foot than bluegrass. Creeping red fescue is well suited for the growing conditions in northern Michigan.



