

Healthy Great Falls: Your Lawn



Keeping it beautiful, keeping it healthy

The health of our local waterways and groundwater begins right in your yard. You can protect our natural resources while building a better lawn, better topsoil and saving money.

1. FIRST : SOIL TEST

Before you apply any fertilizer, or apply anything at all, get a soils test. Pick up a free soil test kit at the Great Falls Public Library. Follow directions precisely for accurate results. You get results in the mail.



2. ONLY ADD WHAT SOIL TEST SHOWS YOU NEED.

The test shows pH, and availability of phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium. Adding more fertilizer than your soil can absorb means the excess runs off into a nearby stream, leaches into our groundwater, and drains to the Bay, creating deadzones.

Some estimates say that up to 90% of spring fertilizer ends up in our watershed, and in the Bay... and decidedly NOT on your lawn.

Too much fertilizer in the spring leads to leaf overgrowth at the expense of food reserves and root growth, increasing injury to lawns from summer disease and drought. High nitrogen fertilizers and excess watering encourage fungal diseases.

3. FEED YOUR SOIL, NOT YOUR LAWN.

Good topsoil is the real secret to great grass. Good topsoil teems with life. Good topsoil corrects most of your lawncare problems. It reduces watering needs, reduces pests, resists drought, and utilizes fertilizers efficiently. Learn more about feeding your soil here:

Virginia Dept. of Conservation and Recreation Lawn Care and Garden guide:

http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/soil_and_water/documents/yardcare.pdf

Chesapeake Bay Foundation lawn care guide: <http://www.cbf.org/Document.Doc?id=35>

4. CHOOSE THE RIGHT FERTILIZER and TIME IT RIGHT:

The right fertilizer should be based on your soils test results, and the type of grass you have.



The Best Choice for Great Falls: natural organic fertilizers. The next best are slow release or controlled release fertilizers.

- **Best options:** composted leaves, composted manure, compost tea, bonemeal, greensand (a marine mineral), pelletized alfalfa, cottonseed meal, and worm castings. Pelletized alfalfa provides slow release of nutrients and is safe for kids, wildlife and watershed.
- **Worst options:** synthetic quick release fertilizers because they are water soluble, and most washes away after a rain. **Synthetic fertilizers can contain herbicides and pesticides which kill earthworms and soil microorganisms that contribute to healthy soil.**

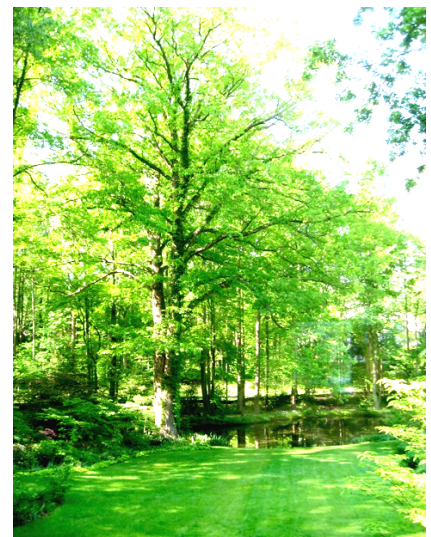
▪ **Remember: herbicides, pesticides and fungicides poison food sources for helpful birds, pollinators, earthworms and microorganisms.**

Timing: Most Great Falls lawns are cool season grasses, including Kentucky blue grass, tall fescue, perennial rye grass and fine fescues, **and the best time to fertilize cool season grasses is from Mid-August through November. Fertilizing in spring is detrimental to cool season grasses, not well absorbed, and should be avoided.**

Understand nutrients: **Nitrogen** is a building block for protein and growth regulators; **Phosphorus** supports metabolism, respiration and photosynthesis; **Potassium** forms starch, regulates water, resists disease and forms chlorophyll.

BEST LAWN CARE PRACTICES:

- **Fertilize with organic, slow release products, and lime**, if indicated in test, in the fall
- **Water in the morning**, no more than ½ inch an hour
- **Mow high: 2.5 – 3.5 inches** for Great Falls lawns
- **Leave grass clippings on lawn** to recycle nutrients, create better topsoil and retain water.
- Get rid of **weeds** with a shovel or hand tools, use **vinegar**, spread **corn gluten** in the spring on established lawns to prevent weed seeds from germinating.
- **Sprinkler systems waste groundwater resources.** Dormant grass in summer may be slightly “tan”, but is not dead!



Beautiful , healthy, local lawn accomplished using no herbicides or pesticides.

For more information contact: robrentsch@cox.net

Great Falls Citizens Association, Environment Committee: Robin Rentsch, Eleanor Anderson, Amy Stephan.