

Tips for a green lawn, not a green lake

Keep mower blades sharp

Dull blades shred grass, damaging the roots and increasing risk of insects and disease

Mow grass no shorter lawn 3-4 inches. Why?

- Taller blades shade out weeds.
- Less fertilizer is needed to keep grass green and healthy.
- Longer blades mean deeper roots, which aid in erosion control and less runoff.
- Longer blades mean less mowing and more time to enjoy your yard!

Leave grass clippings on the law (*grasscycling*)

Remove all pet waste– bag and throw in trash

Replace turf grass with native grasses

Plant raingardens and filter strips

Remember:

the deeper the root systems + the wider the buffer= the greater the impact on protecting water quality.

What if I use a Lawn Care Company?

You can still reduce the non-point source pollution and nutrient runoff leaving your property when using a lawn care service.

Here are some questions to ask your lawn care company:

Do they test the soil before applying fertilizer?

Will they share the results with you?

Are they aware of any local regulations for the protected watershed of Skaneateles Lake?

Do they follow DEC phosphorous regulations?

What fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides do they routinely use?

Helpful Contacts for Skaneateles Watershed Residents

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County
315-424-9485

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cortland County
607-391-2660

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cayuga County
315-225-1183

Cayuga County Soil & Water Conservation District
315-252-4171

Cortland County Soil & Water Conservation District
607-756-5991

Onondaga County Soil & Water Conservation District
315-457-0325

Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program
315-457-0325

Syracuse Water Department (Skaneateles)
315-448-8366

NYSDEC Division of Water (Nutrient Runoff Law)
518-402-8086

NYS DEC Region 7 Water and Wastewater-
315-426-7500

NYS DEC Compliance (Permits) 607-753-3095

NYS DEC Spill Prevention & Response 800-457-7362

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Lawn Care for Water Quality

A Homeowner's Guide



Help Protect our Drinking Water

Look inside for easy tips on how to reduce the nutrient pollution leaving your lawn and protect water quality in the streams and lakes in your watershed community.



Cornell Cooperative Extension
Onondaga County



Threats to Water Quality

Phosphorus, found in lawn fertilizers, is one of the leading causes of water pollution (NYSDEC, 2019). Whether you live on the shoreline or a mile from the lake, excess phosphorous from **all** properties in the Skaneateles watershed can wash off and pollute local tributaries, streams, and degrade water quality in Skaneateles Lake.



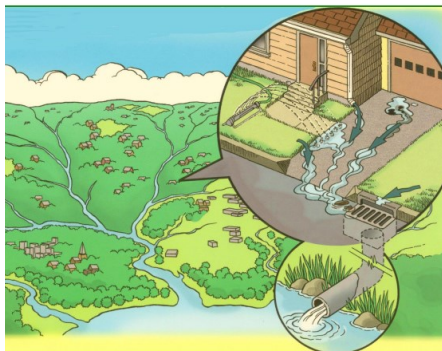
Photo by Nigel Moll

Phosphorous is the leading nutrient contributing to Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), which contain blue-green algae which give off harmful toxins that

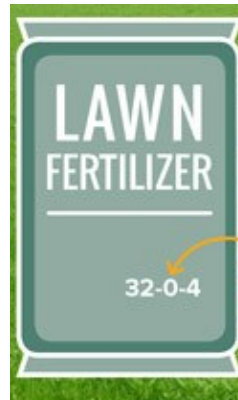
threaten our lake, our drinking water supply, and our health. Skaneateles Lake had its first confirmed HAB in 2017 (*above*).

How do fertilizers enter the lake?

As water travels over our yards it picks up, dissolves, and carries the nutrients in fertilizers, and other pollutants, as it flows through the watershed. Whether the runoff is from a rainstorm, a sprinkler, or DIY carwash, the excess water and whatever it picked up along the way flows into storm drains, sewers, and enters streams and in this watershed, eventually Skaneateles Lake.



Look for the Zero



Before buying lawn fertilizer, check the bag for a set of three numbers showing the percentage of nitrogen (*left*), phosphorus (*middle*) and potassium (*right*).

Buy a bag with a "0" in the middle. Zero in the middle means phosphorus free, which means:

Less waste - Why pay for a chemical your lawn doesn't need? Generally, only newly established lawns or those with poor soil need phosphorus. Phosphorus applied to a lawn that doesn't need it won't be used and can cause water pollution.

Don't waste your time and money on applying something your lawn doesn't need!

Always do a soil test first to determine if fertilizer is needed.

Less hassle - It's against the law* to use phosphorus on lawns that don't need it. (New York State Environmental Conservation Law, article 17, title 21 and Agriculture and Markets Law § 146-g) Stay up to date with local laws, as some municipalities are moving to implement stricter regulations.

Less pollution- Join the community wide effort to follow the NRL law and prevent excess nutrient runoff from private properties entering the lake and causing water quality issues like the HABs (*right*).



HAB on Skaneateles, 2018

Follow the Law!*

*NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Nutrient Runoff

- Do not use lawn fertilizer that contains phosphorus unless
 - you are establishing a new lawn
 - or a soil test shows that your lawn does not have enough phosphorus.
- Do not apply any lawn fertilizer between December 1 - April 1.
- Do not apply fertilizer on sidewalks, driveways or other impervious surfaces.
- If fertilizer spills onto these surfaces, you **MUST** sweep it up to prevent it from washing into drains or waterways. Do not hose it off.
- Do not apply lawn fertilizer within 20 feet of any water body unless...
 - There is *at least* a 10-foot buffer of shrubs, trees or other plants between the area you are fertilizing and the water, or
 - Fertilizer can be applied no closer than 3 feet from the water using a device with a spreader guard, deflector shield or drop

Always do a soil test first

If you think your lawn might need extra phosphorus, test your soil. Tests cost \$10-\$20.

1. Have testing done through your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office. *
2. Consult your local Soil and Water Conservation District, free soil tests may be available.*
*Recommended. Contacts on back.
3. Find a commercial laboratory that tests soil.
4. Use a home test kit. These tend to be less accurate and do not come with fertilizer recommendations.