

Lake County Fertilizer Ordinance

Ord. # 2017-55

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a Fertilizer Ordinance?

The adoption of a fertilizer ordinance is a requirement of the State of Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act. This state legislation required all jurisdictions which have a Springs Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) area within their boundaries to have the Model Ordinance for Florida-Friendly Fertilizer Use on Urban Landscapes or an equivalent adopted by July 1, 2017. Lake County is included within the Wekiva BMAP and the Silver Springs BMAP.

If I live in a city within Lake County, does the Fertilizer Ordinance apply to me?

No, at this time the Ordinance is only for unincorporated Lake County.

Why is the Fertilizer Ordinance concentrated on nitrogen & phosphorous and not all nutrients?

Nitrogen and phosphorous are the two nutrients that are most problematic in waterbodies and are responsible for contributing to the imbalance of plants and animals causing an unhealthy aquatic ecosystem. Regulation of nutrients, including both phosphorus and nitrogen contained in fertilizer, will help improve and maintain water and habitat quality.

What do the three numbers on my fertilizer's label mean?

The three numbers shown on fertilizer labels are the percentages of nitrogen (N), phosphate (P₂O₅), and potash (K₂O), also referred to as potassium, contained in the fertilizer. An example is: 10-10-10 means 10% nitrogen, 10% phosphorus, and 10% potassium.

What is the function of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium?

Nitrogen, which helps with the development of chlorophyll, is what give plants their green foliage. Phosphorus helps with bloom development. Potassium aids with photosynthesis and controls the exchange of carbon dioxide. All three are major nutrients used in the building of new plant tissue and energy transfer within plant cells.

What is a fertilizer-free zone?

A fertilizer-free zone is an area where the application of fertilizer is prohibited any time. All residents are prohibited from using fertilizer within 15 feet of any waterbody. Residents, especially those living near waterbodies, are encouraged to plant native vegetation and practice Florida-friendly landscaping techniques to reduce or eliminate fertilizer use. Caution shall be used to prevent direct deposition of nutrients into the water.

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What would over-fertilization mean for my yard and water quality?

Using too much fertilizer and applying it improperly are the biggest problems related to fertilizer and water quality. Your grass can only absorb so much fertilizer, so any excess fertilizer runs off your lawn or soaks through the ground and finds its way into local waterbodies or groundwater. It can also harm your lawn and landscaping by burning or wilting the plants. Over-fertilization is wasting your money.

I use a lawn company. How am I supposed to know what kind of fertilizer they use on my lawn?

Ask your lawn service or landscaper. Licensed professionals should be able to show you exactly what they are putting on your yard, along with how much and what percentage of slow release nitrogen (SRN) they are using. As of January 1, 2014, companies that apply fertilizer, are required to obtain a limited certification for Urban Landscape Commercial Fertilizer Application from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) {required by Section 482.1562, Florida Statutes (2015)}. Applicators should be aware of local fertilizer ordinances and their restrictions.

I have a lawn service business and often apply for my clients. How do the fertilizer rules affect me?

The new regulations concerning nitrogen and phosphorus apply to the fertilizer you use in your business, but does not require you to obtain any additional certifications. You must still obtain a limited certification for Urban Landscape Commercial Fertilizer Application from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) {required by Section 482.1562, Florida Statutes (2015)}. These requirements went into effect on January 1, 2014.

Can I still use my rotary spreader for applying fertilizer?

Yes, if you have a deflector shield attached. Make sure you apply properly so the fertilizer does not end up on impervious surfaces such as driveways, sidewalks and streets or in waterbodies such as lakes, ponds, ditches and rivers. Fertilizer that falls on impervious surfaces must be swept up and placed back on the lawn or in an appropriate container. If you live along any waterbody, you are prohibited from using fertilizer within 15 feet of the shoreline.

Will this Fertilizer Ordinance help stop algae blooms?

The nutrients that runoff of our yards into our lakes and rivers act like food for the algae. Reducing the nutrient runoff from fertilizers will also help reduce the amount and intensity of local algae blooms.

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Will this Fertilizer Ordinance save me money?

It is much more cost effective to prevent nutrients from entering our waterways than it is to remove them once in our waterways. Also, applying fertilizer according to best management practices will save you from over fertilizing areas and wasting fertilizer in areas not used for lawns, trees or shrubs.

What are the Lake County Fertilizer Ordinance limits/requirements regarding nutrients such as Nitrogen and Phosphorus?

Fertilizer containing nitrogen shall not be applied before seeding or sodding a site, and shall not be applied for the first thirty (30) days after seeding or sodding, except when hydro-seeding for temporary or permanent erosion control in an emergency situation (wildfire, etc.), or in accordance with the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan for that site.

Nitrogen or phosphorus fertilizer shall not be applied to Turf Grass between the dates of June 1 to September 30 each year.

Fertilizers containing Nitrogen applied to Turf or landscaping plants between the dates of October 1 to May 31 of each year shall contain no less than 50% slow release nitrogen as defined in the ordinance.

Fertilizer spilled over or applied on impervious surfaces must be cleaned up and properly disposed or re-applied to the turf grass or landscape plants.

How do I know if my fertilizer is 50% slow release nitrogen?

Look on the labeling information posted on the front of the packaging. Look for the words "slow release", "water insoluble", "slowly available" or "organically available". These terms should be accompanied by a percentage designation. Example: 50% slow release nitrogen on the label.

Why is slow release fertilizer better than regular fast-release forms?

Slow release fertilizer control the release of nutrients in the soils and not leach out with runoff or filtration. The nutrients are chemically bound to slowly release its contents and make available for plant growth over a longer period of time.

Are there any exemptions to this ordinance?

Yes, exemptions are as follows: Bona fide farm operations, Pastures used for grazing livestock, Golf courses, athletic fields and Turf managed for active recreation, whose owners implement best management practices as described in Section 5E-1.003(2)(d), F.A.C. entitled "Fertilizers Labeled, for Sports Turf at Golf Courses, Parks and Athletic Fields", as amended.

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Any special licensing required by applicators?

No more than is already required by State Law. All commercial applicators of Fertilizer shall have and carry in their possession at all times when applying fertilizer, evidence of certification by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services as a Commercial Fertilizer Applicator per Section 5E-14.117(18), F.A.C. All businesses applying Fertilizer to Turf and/or landscape plants (including but not limited to residential lawns, golf courses, commercial properties, and multi-family and condominium properties) must ensure that at least one employee has a "Florida-Friendly Best Management Practices for Protection of Water Resources by the Green Industries" training certificate.

How do I know if my landscape or lawn care company has the proper certification to apply fertilizer?

When considering a company for landscaping or yard work to include fertilizing, you should ask the company representative to produce the evidence of certification as per Section 5E-14.117(18), FAC, for your inspection. They are required to have and carry this information at all times when applying fertilizer.

What are the consequences of violating this ordinance?

The Lake County Board of County Commissioners have granted a grace period to extend to one year after the effective date of this ordinance. After the initial one year grace period, any violation of the provisions of this ordinance may be subject to the Code Enforcement proceedings outlined in Chapter 8, Lake County Code.

What is the effective date of this ordinance?

The effective date of this ordinance is November 21, 2017.

Can I be accountable if my landscaper/lawn specialist violates this ordinance?

Yes, the property owner on the property on which a violation of Lake County Code has occurred is responsible for compliance to this ordinance. Remember, this pertains only to unincorporated areas of Lake County. You can ask your lawn care company to provide you with information regarding the kind of fertilizer and its contents packaging information at any time.

During the period which fertilizers containing nitrogen or phosphorus is prohibited, what soil supplements, if any, may be used.

Lake County recommends that you consult with the Lake County Agricultural Extension Office in Tavares. You may call 352-253-4101 or go online to www.lakecountyfl.gov/offices/extension_services for expert guidance and information on your gardening and turf care questions.