

Homeowner/Resident Frequently Asked Questions

Video: [Fertilizer Ordinance-what to know video](#)

Q. If I live outside of unincorporated County (like City of Largo etc) does the Fertilizer Ordinance apply to me?

A. Yes, the Ordinance is county-wide regardless of what city you live in.

Q. Why is the Fertilizer Ordinance only for nitrogen & phosphorous and not all fertilizers?

A. Nitrogen and phosphorous are the two nutrients that are most commonly found in excess in waterbodies contributing to algae blooms and fish kills. Fertilizers are labeled N-P-K (nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium). Make sure your fertilizer is in compliance with the ordinance.

Q. Why is there a blackout period?

A. The blackout period coincides with our rainy season. From June 1- September 30 our weather is unpredictable and rain is very frequent. The landscapes don't have enough time to absorb the nutrients before a shower washes them off your property and into the nearest waterbody contributing to algae blooms and fish kills.

Q. Can I be fined if my landscaper uses fertilizer that is not allowed?

A. Yes, both homeowners and landscapers may be fined if they violate the Fertilizer Ordinance.

Q. I have reclaimed water. Should I use fertilizer?

A. Nutrient levels in reclaimed water are much higher than in other irrigation water sources; therefore, if irrigating with reclaimed water you may not need additional fertilizer. While reclaimed water offers many benefits, it also can lead to landscaping and pollution problems if not properly managed. Contact your reclaimed water supplier to get information on nutrient content. Visit the Pinellas County Utilities website for Frequently Asked Questions about reclaimed water:

<http://www.pinellascounty.org/utilities/faq-reclaimed.htm>

Q. Is my grass going to turn brown without regular fertilizer application?

A. Not necessarily, not all lawns require nitrogen & phosphorous to be healthy. Nutrients such as iron can be used to green-up lawns without the excess growth nitrogen provides.

Q. How do I know which fertilizer to use at what time of the year?

A. Fertilizers with phosphorous (N-P-K) are not allowed unless you have obtained a soil test that indicates a phosphorous deficiency. The results of the soil test must be submitted to Pinellas County Watershed Management prior to phosphorous application. From June 1 - September 30 fertilizers with nitrogen or phosphorous cannot be applied as this is the rainy season and blackout period for Pinellas County. During this period Summer Safe products like compost and micronutrient amendments (Fe, Mg, Mn, K) are recommended.

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

A. The only fertilizers allowed for sale in Pinellas County are at least 50% slow release nitrogen. Fertilizers are labeled with three numbers on the front of the package. These numbers stand for N-P-K (nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium). We've made a guide for retailers so they know what products meet the 50% SRN requirement [Retail Fertilizer Decision Tree & Guide](#).

Q. Does my landscaper know about the Fertilizer Ordinance?

A. They should but they may not. Your landscaper must display a decal (sticker) on the service vehicle. Your fertilizer applicator should also have a decal on the service vehicle. If you do not see the decal, you should ask your service professional if they know about the ordinance and have them call Pinellas County Watershed Management at (727) 464-4425 for more information.

Q. I live in a neighborhood with many green lawns, how can I teach my neighbors that they may be using too much?

A. Pinellas County and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program have produced door hangers you can distribute through your community to help educate your neighbors and protect water resources. Please visit the [Be Floridian](#) website, email watershed@pinellascounty.org or call (727) 893-2765 to obtain these free resources for your community.

Q. Can I ask my landscaper what kind of fertilizer they use on my lawn?

A. Absolutely, your landscaper should be able and willing to tell you what components (N, P, K, etc) are in the fertilizer they use on your property. You should also ask your landscaper if they know about the ordinance and refer them to Pinellas County Watershed Management (727) 464-4425 for training requirements.

Q. Does the Fertilizer Ordinance affect potted plants?

A. No, the Ordinance doesn't apply to potted plants.

Q. When is the best time to fertilize?

A. The best time is twice a year during spring (April/May) and fall (October/November). There is a blackout period in the summer from June 1- September 30 where fertilizers containing Nitrogen or Phosphorous cannot be used. During the summer it is recommended to use Summer Safe Products like iron to green up the lawn without getting the excess growth provided by nitrogen.

Q. Why is using a slow-release fertilizer better than a regular (fast-release) form?

A. A slow-release form controls the nitrogen's release, which lessens the chance of nutrients getting into the water resources (groundwater, lakes, bays, etc). Slow-release forms also need fewer applications because they release the nitrogen slowly over longer periods of time. Regular (quick-release) fertilizer is more likely to reach water resources as they release nitrogen very quickly and are more susceptible to runoff and leaching into groundwater.

Q. If I decide to use fertilizer, how can I use it without harming our water?

A. First, use fertilizers that do not violate the fertilizer ordinance, no phosphorous (N-**0**-K). Select the right type of fertilizer for your lawn and landscape. Consider that much of Florida's soil contains plenty of phosphorus so you may not need to add this nutrient. Second, apply fertilizer only when you really need it, if you need it at all. Make sure not to over-fertilize, as this can harm your lawn and cause runoff into local waters. Third, apply the fertilizer properly, being careful to avoid spills and avoid bodies of water.

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

A. Using too much fertilizer and applying it improperly are the biggest problems with fertilizer and water quality. Too much fertilizer is more likely to find its way into local water sources or groundwater. Too much fertilizer can also harm your lawn and landscape by burning or wilting plants.

Q. How often does the Ordinance allow me to apply fertilizer?

A. Under the Ordinance, fertilizer may be applied at a rate not to exceed four pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet per year. Each application is limited to one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet.

Q. What is the function of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium?

A. Nitrogen, which helps with the development of chlorophyll, is what gives plants their green foliage. Phosphorus helps with bloom development. Potassium aids with photosynthesis and controls the exchange of carbon dioxide.

Q. What are organic fertilizers? Are they a better choice?

A. Yes, organic fertilizer nutrients come from only the remains or by-product of an organism. Organic fertilizers rely on soil organisms to break them down to release nutrients, and, usually, this occurs over a long period of time. Organic fertilizers release at a slower rate than traditional quick release fertilizers. It might take a while longer for the nutrients to be released to the plant, but typically lawns and landscapes grown with organic fertilizers can produce plants with a higher tolerance for drought, disease and insect resistance. Using organic fertilizers also costs less and takes up less time.