

## Frequently Asked Questions for Professional Fertilizer Applicators and Landscapers

### **Q. I apply fertilizer as part of my job. What training, certificate, license, etc am I required to have?**

**A.** Each fertilizer applicator must take the **Green Industry Best Management Practices Training**. It is offered through the University of Florida Extension Service. Visit [Pinellas County Extension](#) for the class schedule and registration. For questions call 727-582-2100. The class is available online at [GIBMP Online](#). At the end of the training is a test each applicator must take and pass to receive their certificate. A copy of the certificate is required to apply for the **Limited Commercial Fertilizer Applicator license**. Each professional applicator in the State of Florida must have this license. After you receive your GIBMP certification, apply for the FDACS Limited Commercial Fertilizer Applicator license with this application: <http://forms.freshfromflorida.com/13677.pdf>

### **Q. Is there a way to know if I, or an employee, or a potential landscaper has the Green Industry Best Management Practices Certificate mentioned above?**

**A.** Yes. The University of Florida holds the database information regarding everyone who is certified in GIBMPs. You can search by the individuals name or the company's name. The website will tell you the date the person was GIBMP certified. Search here: [http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/professionals/certification\\_lists/cert\\_county\\_name.shtml](http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/professionals/certification_lists/cert_county_name.shtml) Hint: use 'Ctrl' and the 'F' key to use the 'FIND' search option, you can type in a partial name and matches will be highlighted throughout the webpage.

### **Q. Is there a way to know if I, or an employee, or a potential landscaper has the Fertilizer License mentioned above?**

**A.** Yes. The Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) has a website for looking up licenses. You can search applicator names and company names. All FDACS licenses are listed on the website. Search here: <http://app1.flaes.org/ceu/>

### **Q. I am an independent landscaper. I do not work for a big landscape company. Am I required to have the Fertilizer License mentioned above?**

**A.** Yes. Each person who applies fertilizer as part of a landscape service must have the FDACS Commercial Fertilizer Applicator License according to State Law.

### **Q. What do I tell my customers who say their lawn is going to turn brown without regular fertilizer application?**

**A.** In Pinellas County soils are rich in phosphorous. There are extended release fertilizers available to provide nitrogen over a longer period of time. Micronutrients such as iron, magnesium, and potassium can be used to green-up lawns without the excess growth nitrogen provides. Additionally, compost based products are encouraged to improve soil quality.

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

**A.** The best way to know is by consulting the literature and information provided from your GIBMP course and the Pinellas County Fertilizer Ordinance. Fertilizers with phosphorous (N-P-K) are not allowed unless you or your customer has obtained a soil test that indicates a phosphorous deficiency. The results of the soil test must be submitted to Pinellas County prior to phosphorous application. From October 1 – May 31 granular fertilizers must contain at least 50% slow release nitrogen. From June 1 - September 30 fertilizers with nitrogen or phosphorous are not allowed, during this period compost and micronutrient fertilizers (Fe, Mg, Mn, K) are recommended.

### **Q. If the Fertilizer Ordinance says I cannot use fertilizer, why are the stores still selling it?**

**A.** Stores should not be selling fertilizers containing nitrogen or phosphorous from June 1- September 30 each year. Please help us continue to educate the public by notifying us of any stores in Pinellas County that are selling these types of product. [watershed@pinellascounty.org](mailto:watershed@pinellascounty.org)

### **Q. What if I don't offer fertilizer application as part of my landscape service?**

**A.** At a minimum all landscapers are required to take the Landscape Best Management Practices training course. There are many activities that are considered landscape service, including tree service. Visit [Landscape BMP Certification Courses](#) for the class schedule and registration. For questions call 727-464-4425.

### **Q. Is there a grace period for fertilizer applicators to get the training and Limited Commercial Fertilizer Applicator license?**

**A.** Not anymore. As of 1/1/14 all fertilizer applicators must hold the license before they can apply ANY type of fertilizer to ANY type of property.

### **Q. Is there a grace period for landscapers that do not use fertilizer to get the county-approved training?**

**A.** Yes, the grace period is 90 days from first day of employment. Any person or company providing landscape services must be certified in Landscape Best Management Practices. Visit [Landscape BMP Certification Courses](#) for the class schedule and registration. For questions call 727-464-4425 and select the option for landscape maintenance professionals.

### **Q. How will people know if I am certified in Best Management Practices?**

**A.** Pinellas County will issue a vehicle decal stating which BMP class you are certified in. The vehicle decal must be displayed on the exterior of the vehicle during landscape or fertilizer application activities.

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

**A.** Under the Ordinance, fertilizer may be applied at a rate not to exceed one (1) pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet and no more than four (4) pounds per 1000 square feet per year.

**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 microbes to break them down to release nutrients. Usually, this occurs over a long period of time. Organic fertilizers typically have a much higher slow release rate than that of traditional quick release fertilizers. Lawns and landscapes grown with organic fertilizers can produce plants with a higher tolerance for drought, disease, and insect resistance.

**Q. Does the Fertilizer Ordinance affect potted plants?**

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

**Q. Why is using a slow-release fertilizer better than a regular (quick-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. However, it is important to note that any type of fertilizer that lands on hard surfaces is a threat to water quality so always sweep or blow granules back into the landscape.