

Resident Do-It-Yourselfers

Pinellas County residents can have a healthy landscape without endangering the health of our shared water resources. By carefully following the four steps outlined below, you can be confident that you've made wise fertilizer choices that will help to protect our waters.

Step 1: Determine your fertilizer needs

What is Fertilizer? All plants require certain chemical elements, or nutrients, for proper growth and appearance. Fertilizers may be used to make up for nutrients lacking in the soil.

Soil Testing to determine what elements and how much is needed. A soil test should always be performed before starting a fertilizing program. It is important to know the nutrient levels and what may be deficient in the soil, so you can give the plants what they need and not waste money on fertilizers that were not needed. It will give you the pH, lime requirement, phosphorous, potassium, calcium and manganese with recommendations of what is needed. If you have distinctly different soil types in your yard you would need a separate test for each type. The tests are inexpensive and should be performed every two years.

Phosphorous (P) and Soil Testing Most Pinellas County soils contain naturally high levels of phosphorus, so "zero-phosphorus" fertilizers are the rule in Pinellas County unless a state-certified laboratory soil test confirms a deficiency in the soil underlying the turf or landscape plant in question. Contact [IFAS Soils Lab](#) to obtain a soil testing kit, or call (727) 582-2100.

Read the Fertilizer Label. The three identifying numbers on a fertilizer label indicate the percentage of the three primary nutrients by weight. Nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium or **N-P-K**

Nitrogen is essential for growth and reproduction. Phosphorous is important establishment and flower/seed. Potassium Increases drought and stress tolerance.

Fertilizers may also contain secondary nutrients such as calcium, sulfur, and magnesium and micronutrients including iron, manganese, boron, copper, molybdenum, nickel, chlorine, and zinc. These products may be applied, as necessary, anywhere on your landscape throughout the year. For example, applying iron in the summer can be an effective way to "green-up" your lawn without encouraging unwanted growth.

Step 2: Choose an Appropriate Fertilizer

Reclaim Water contains some nitrogen. If you use reclaim water determine how much less nitrogen you need to apply, use the guide at this link. [Reduce Fertilizer When Using Reclaim](#)

Calculate the Percentage of Slow Release Nitrogen Nitrogen in fertilizers may come from a single source or a combination of sources. Some nitrogen sources are "quick release" and other sources are "slow release". According to the University of Florida, fertilizers with slow release nitrogen are more likely to be used by plants and less likely to leach into groundwater or wash away in runoff.

In Pinellas County, granular fertilizers must contain at least 50% slow release nitrogen. A product with 50% slow release nitrogen means that 50% of the nitrogen is available immediately and 50% will be slowly released over a period of time. We've done this part for you. All retail outlets in Pinellas County sell only 50% (or higher) slow release nitrogen. If you want to determine if your meets the requirement please see the Retail Fertilizer Guide. [Retail Fertilizer Flowchart Guide](#)

You can dispose of old fertilizers and other chemicals at the Pinellas County HEC3 (Household Electronics and Chemical Collection Center) for FREE.

HEC3 - facility 2855 109th Ave. N., St. Petersburg (727) 464-7500

Step 3: Determine How Much to Apply

When making your plan to fertilize, please remember the following regulations:

- Fertilizer application is limited to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet (1 lb N/1000 square feet) per application.
- Up to 4 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet may be applied per year. Mature and properly watered lawn or landscape may not need as much nitrogen, depending on your site factors and environmental stresses.

Determine the Area (Square Footage) of Your Lawn or Landscape To determine the square footage of lawn to be fertilized, measure it directly or measure the entire area length by width, then make subtractions for house, driveway, and other areas that are not to be fertilized.

Calculate the Proper Amount of Fertilizer to Apply To calculate the amount of fertilizer needed to deliver 1 pound of nitrogen to a 1000 square foot area (1 lb N/1000 sq.ft.), divide the number 100 by the percentage of total nitrogen (first number on the bag). $100 \div N =$ pounds of fertilizer to apply on 1000 square feet [Click this link for the fertilizer calculator](#) to do the calculations for you. You will need information from your fertilizer label and the square footage of the area to be fertilized

Step 4: Apply Appropriately

Applying appropriately means applying the right amount of fertilizer at the right time in the right place. Nowhere is this more important than on a peninsula such as Pinellas County where activities on land can have immediate impacts on local waters.

Rainy Season During the rainy season, **June 1 through September 30**, fertilizers containing nitrogen or phosphorus cannot be applied. However, products containing only secondary or micronutrients, such as magnesium and iron may be applied.

Buffer Zones Pinellas County is known for its exceptional aquatic wildlife. Extreme caution is vital when fertilizing near any body of water. Fertilizers containing nitrogen or phosphorus cannot be applied within 10 feet of any of these highly sensitive areas: ponds, streams, water courses, lakes, canals, retention areas, drains and drainage ditches and wetlands.

Impervious Surfaces Fertilizer should never be applied to impervious (hard) surfaces such as streets, sidewalks, and driveways. Accidental spills should be swept up immediately.

Use the Spreader Safely Before you begin, be sure that both the spreader and fertilizer are dry and that the spreader is on a hard surface (easy to sweep up an accidental spill). While wearing gloves and safety glasses, close the broadcaster vent and fill the hopper slowly, keeping fertilizer away from eyes and skin. Sweep up any spilled fertilizer immediately and return to the package. Many fertilizer bags have spreader settings printed on the label. However, these settings should only be used when the recommended rate of application is 1 lb N/1000 sq.ft. or less. If the recommended rate of application is greater than 1 lb N/1000 sq.ft. or if the fertilizer label does not list spreader settings, set the spreader on the smallest setting, add the appropriate amount of fertilizer (see Step 3) and go over the area in a north/south direction. When you have covered the area to which you are applying the product, or when you have half of the fertilizer left in the hopper, turn and cover in an east/west orientation until you run out of fertilizer.

Use a Deflector Shield The Ordinance requires that you use a deflector shield when applying fertilizer. The shield needs to be positioned to deflect fertilizer granules away from impervious (hard) surfaces, bodies of water and storm drains.