

Real Estate

Your new rules regarding lawn fertilizer

By ISABEL JUNKIN

CHESTER — The largest crop grown in Maryland is not corn, as you might think; it is turfgrass. The acreage of turfgrass in Maryland is almost double that of corn.

And while farmers have to follow strict nutrient management regulations, homeowners traditionally have had free reign when applying fertilizer to their lawns.

Until now, that is. In the Chesapeake Bay watershed, people are beginning to realize that home lawn fertilization contributes a significant amount of phosphorus and nitrogen to our waters, helping to fuel the algae blooms, dead zones, and general decline in water quality that so severely impact our local streams, rivers, and the Bay today. In the

Bay watershed, the states of Virginia, New York, New Jersey, and now Maryland have all passed strict legislation regulating the use of home lawn fertilizer in an attempt to reduce its negative impacts on local waters and the Chesapeake Bay.

Maryland's Lawn Fertilizer Use Act of 2011 will be implemented in phases and goes into full effect by October 1st, 2013.

This new law affects every Marylander who maintains a home lawn. Traditionally, the responsibility for good water quality has rested solely on farmers, septic systems, and waste water treatment plants.

Now, however, every single person who cares for a home lawn will be held accountable as well. Now we all have the chance to step up to the challenge

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and become better stewards of our environment, simply by changing the way we care for our lawns.

This new legislation limits the amount of fertilizer legally applied to lawns and aims to reduce the amount that runs off into waterways.

The legislation bans the use of phosphorus in lawn fertilizer except when establishing a new lawn or when a soil test indicates deficiencies. The act also restricts the amount of nitrogen that

can be applied to lawns. The law prohibits the application of lawn fertilizer to frozen ground or to impervious surfaces. It also prohibits the application of lawn fertilizer between November 15th and March 1st.

The legislation bans the application of lawn fertilizer within 15 feet of a water body. These stipulations encourage homeowners to apply lawn fertilizer only when needed to maintain healthy grass, thereby decreasing the amount of lawn fertilizer that simply washes off our lawns and pollutes

our waterways.

Not only will complying with these regulations help the Bay, it will also reduce the amount of fertilizer you buy, thereby saving you money. Additional changes to your lawn maintenance routine will reduce nutrient runoff and also save you time and money.

For example, you can reduce the number of times you mow your lawn and increase your mowing height, which saves you time and allows grass to grow longer and healthier and absorb more nutrients.

You can leave grass clippings on your lawn, allowing for natural fertilization and reducing the amount of fertilizer you need to buy.

Following the practices mandated by this legislation will contribute to improving water quality. Similar legislation limiting lawn fertilizers con-

taining phosphorus was enacted in 2007 in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Water quality sampling after the ordinance went into effect showed statistically significant reductions of phosphorus. Concentrations were reduced by 28 percent after just one year.

This example shows that by simply changing how we care for our lawns we can make a significant difference in the quality of our waters.

Right now, counties all across Maryland are working to reduce their nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the Chesapeake Bay as part of the Total Maximum Daily Load process. By understanding and following the new lawn fertilizer legislation you can be a part of this vital effort for healthier water.

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