

Lake-Friendly Tips for Shoreline Properties

As spring lawn care activities swing into high gear along Antrim County's Chain of Lakes, there are many things shoreline residents can do to help protect water quality and still maintain a perfectly green lawn.

One of the most important is selecting a phosphorous-free fertilizer, which is available at local nurseries and hardware stores.

Studies of our local lakes indicate that lawn fertilizer is one of the largest sources of pollution. Fertilizers containing even small amounts of phosphorous promote growth of harmful algae and aquatic plants that degrade water quality.



In addition, soil testing should be conducted to determine if fertilizers are needed. Testing is available through the Michigan State University Extension office in Bellaire. MSU will return test results with fertilizer recommendations. If fertilizer is necessary, be sure to fertilize the lawn and not the lake. Use the smallest amount of fertilizer. It should not be applied just before a rain.

Experts say the average lawn receives 10 times as many chemical pesticides and fertilizers per acre as typical farmland, suggesting that many lawns are overfertilized.

Lakefront owners should also consider planting a fescue mixture rather than bluegrass when establishing a new lawn. Fescue requires much less nitrogen than bluegrass and is better suited to weather conditions in northern Michigan. Always choose a locally adapted grass for lawns. Ask the folks at the local hardware store or nursery for advice.

Another tip is to leave natural vegetation along the shoreline. Maintaining trees, shrubs and ground cover helps to preserve water quality, as these plants act as a pollution filter and protect property from erosion. These shoreline buffers enhance property value and can be trimmed to provide views of the lakes. Many lake experts advise "leaving it natural" as the best possible way to protect water quality.

One piece of advice that is often overlooked is the height of the grass. The recommended cutting height is 2 to 2 ½ inches. This allows healthier, greener growth and cuts out the need for excessive fertilization. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn helps retain moisture and adds important nutrients to the soil.

People who don't live on the water can also use all of the above lawn care tips anywhere in the Elk River Chain of Lakes watershed. It is helpful to remember that what

is applied to the land often winds up in our local streams, rivers and lakes. All of the water in the Chain of Lakes flows into Grand Traverse Bay at Elk Rapids.