



## Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP) Newsletter

### Tips for an Eco-Friendly Lawn

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#### Five Tips for an Eco-friendly Lawn

It's spring and lawn care is on the minds of many Long Islanders. Fertilizer is often thought of as a key ingredient to a healthy, vibrant lawn but fertilizer use, especially improper application, can be harmful to the environment. Excess nitrogen in fertilizer pollutes our waterways, negatively impacts aquatic life and interferes with fishing, swimming and boating. In fact, fertilizer is the second leading source of nitrogen contamination of Long Island waters; residential wastewater is the primary source.

In this issue of the LINAP newsletter, we review several ways to care for your lawn while protecting coastal waters, as well as our drinking water supply.

Most important, fertilizer should not be applied before April. Grass simply cannot efficiently absorb fertilizer at this time. Furthermore, **it is illegal to fertilize your lawn in Nassau and Suffolk counties before April 1.**

To be clear, lawns are not a natural landscape feature and usually require high maintenance. If having a lawn is your preferred landscape option, then follow the suggestions below to help decrease the likelihood of overapplying fertilizer and, therefore, reduce the amount of excess nitrogen that enters groundwater and surface water.

1. **Don't start fertilizing!** If you're not currently using fertilizer and you are happy with how your lawn looks, then don't start fertilizing. Many lawns can be aesthetically pleasing without any added fertilizer.
2. **Eliminate or shrink your lawn.** Consider reducing the lawn area requiring fertilizer. One of the most effective ways Long Islanders can do their part to protect local water resources, is to replace their lawn or a portion of it with less resource-intensive landscaping, also known as sustainable landscaping. Sustainable landscaping makes use of native plants to help reduce the amount of fertilizer, pesticides, and water needed to maintain the landscape. Often, native plant species require little to no extra water and fertilizer and help to absorb and filter rainwater. Also, sustainable landscaping can be aesthetically pleasing and can increase property value.
3. **Keep those grass clippings on your lawn.** Mulching mowers finely chop grass into small pieces which get deposited into the lawn and decompose quickly. It is like adding a little bit

of fertilizer every time you mow, and allows you to lessen, or eliminate, chemical fertilizer application. As a general rule, no more than a third of the grass blade should be removed during a single mowing. And it's also good practice to keep the height at least three inches high, which encourages deeper, healthier roots.

4. **Apply less fertilizer to your lawn.** If you decide to use fertilizer, especially on a well-established lawn, then apply one-third to one-half the amount recommended on the fertilizer bag. If you are satisfied, then you applied the right amount. Nice work!
5. **Timing is everything.** If you are going to fertilize, then apply it at the right time – close to Memorial Day and/or Labor Day. Fertilizer shouldn't be applied before April or after mid-October. Nor should it be applied during the hottest summer months when grass is dormant. Grass simply cannot efficiently absorb fertilizer at this time so don't bother trying – you'll just waste fertilizer and money. On Long Island, if you fertilize once a year, it is best to do so around Labor Day.

For more information, please visit the following resources:

[NYS DEC Lawn Fertilizer webpage](#)

[NYS DEC LINAP's Turf Grass Fertilization Recommendations](#)

[NYS DEC "Leave it on the Lawn" webpage](#)



*Native Plants.*

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### **Feeling Inspired? Commit to Personal Steps to Reduce Nitrogen Pollution!**

Take the [Nitrogen Reduction Pledge](#) today! Small steps can lead to big changes and there are plenty of actions we can take to reduce nitrogen in our waterways and create a cleaner future for our most precious resource.

The pledge outlines 11 ways you can reduce personal nitrogen pollution every day:

- Be smart – fertilize your lawn responsibly but it's best to not use fertilizers at all!
- Keep grass clippings on the lawn and bag your leaves.
- Replace your septic system or cesspool with an innovative and advanced treatment system.
- Sweep up any fertilizer that falls on walkways and driveways. Keep fertilizer, grass clipping and leaves out of storm drains.
- Direct downspouts into rain barrels, plant beds, or the lawn rather than onto walkways and the driveway.
- Plant native trees and other plants in your yard.
- Leave a wide strip of deep-rooted plants along the shoreline.
- Pick up pet waste and reduce “poo-lution” (even in your own backyard).
- Drive less and consolidate trips when you run errands.
- Use a commercial car wash rather than washing your vehicle at home.
- Spread the word; encourage friends and family members to take the pledge and help reduce nitrogen pollution!

Take the pledge and be recognized as a leader in our community that takes action for a cleaner and healthier environment.

Click [here](#) to take the pledge!



*Rain Barrel. Photo Credit: Long Island Garden Rewards Program*