



Long Island Watershed Program (LIWP) Newsletter



LONG ISLAND WATERSHED PROGRAM

Poll Highlights Disconnect Between Lawn Care and Environmental Concerns

A new Siena Research Institute poll, commissioned by the Long Island Regional Planning Council (LIRPC) with funding from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), reveals a contradiction in Long Islanders' lawn care practices.

While three out of four homeowners recognize that improper fertilizer use can harm the environment, nearly two-thirds still fertilize their lawns—and more than 90% believe that a green, manicured lawn boosts their property value.

The survey of 1,002 homeowners across Nassau and Suffolk counties was designed to understand attitudes, behaviors, and knowledge around lawn fertilization, one of the largest contributors to nitrogen pollution on Long Island. These findings underscore the need for targeted public education to close the gap between concern and action.

"All Long Islanders have a stake in reducing nitrogen pollution in our waterways, and this poll highlights both the challenge and the opportunity to engage the public. These findings will help the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan bridge the gap between perception and practice," said LIRPC Chairman John Cameron.

Why Fertilizer Matters

Fertilizer contains nitrogen, which can leach into groundwater and wash into bays, harbors, and estuaries. Nitrogen is the leading cause of water quality deterioration on Long Island, fueling harmful algal blooms, killing fish, degrading wetlands, and threatening marine habitats. It also can contaminate the underground aquifers that provide drinking water to every Long Islander.

Beyond lawn care, nitrogen pollution also comes from aging septic systems, cesspools, and stormwater runoff. Collectively, these pollution sources put our coastal ecosystems and drinking water supply at risk.

What the Poll Tells Us

The poll highlighted several important trends:

- **Fertilizer Use:** 65% of Long Islanders fertilize their lawns, with 54% hiring professionals and 45% doing it themselves.
- **Frequency:** 43% of Long Islanders apply fertilizer twice a year, 28% once a year, and 21% more than twice annually.
- **Environmental Awareness:** 76% are concerned about the harm caused by improper fertilizer use, but only 24% engage in five or more protective actions.
- **Knowledge Gaps:** While 58% recognize fertilizer as a leading source of nitrogen pollution, nearly a third remain unsure.
- **Regional Differences:** Nassau residents reported higher fertilizer use (67%) than Suffolk (60%).
- **Public Support:** Nearly 70% of residents support local restrictions on fertilizer use.

The complete polling results can be found [here](#).

What Homeowners Can Do

The good news: there are easy steps homeowners can take to protect water quality without sacrificing lawn health. Follow the recommendations below to help decrease the likelihood of overapplying fertilizer:

- **Skip it if you can:** If your lawn looks fine, don't fertilize. Many lawns stay healthy without it.
- **Shrink your lawn:** Replace part of your lawn with native plants or gardens, which need less fertilizer and water.
- **Leave the clippings:** Mow high, mulch grass, and leave clippings to recycle nutrients naturally.
- **Use less:** Apply one-third to half the recommended amount. Stop once you're satisfied.
- **Fertilize at the right time:** 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.
- **Clean it up:** Sweep fertilizer off sidewalks and driveways so it doesn't wash into storm drains.
- **Think ahead:** Never fertilize before rain or heavy watering—you'll lose nutrients and waste money.

Nitrogen pollution is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing Long Island. By making small changes to lawn care, homeowners can collectively have a big impact on protecting drinking water, bays, and harbors.

For more information, visit the following resources:

- [NYS DEC Lawn Fertilizer webpage](#)
- [NYS DEC LINAP's Turf Grass Fertilization Recommendations](#)
- [NYS DEC Green Yard and Garden Tips](#)
- [LIRPC Sustainable Landscaping Resource Hub](#)

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