

Lawn Fertilization Recommendations

I am excited. The weather is actually warming up, and it is time to start working in the yard. One thing that is on many homeowners minds includes having a healthy, green lawn. An important component of this is proper fertilization. Unfortunately, lawn fertilization is confusing for many, mainly that there are so many choices available. I personally worked at a garden center where at least 20 different lawn fertilizer blends for turf was sold. After customers looked at all of them, they just wanted an employee to tell them what to apply.

Finding out what to apply is not difficult, though. The first thing to do to is test your soil. A basic fertilizer test, costing \$14, reveals factors including soil pH, salinity, soil texture (if the soil is a clay or loam, etc.) and the levels of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) in the soil. From these factors, you can determine what fertilizer blend to apply. Find information about soil testing at: www.usual.usu.edu. Additionally, local Extension offices have soil test collection kits available for free.

Fertilizers include a three number formula on the bag. It gives the percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphate (a P source) and potash (a K source) contained therein. A fertilizer with an analysis of 25-10-5 contains 25% N, 10% phosphate and 5% potash. By weight a 50 pound bag of this blend contains 12 ½ pounds of N, 5 pounds of phosphate and 2 ½ lbs potash.

Utah soils commonly contain sufficient P and K for turf needs. However, test your soil to be sure. If your soil contains sufficient P and K, you should use a fertilizer containing N only. This saves you money because N only fertilizers are less expensive. It also reduces potential ground water pollution.

Slow-release nitrogen fertilizers are also available. They still green-up the lawn, but slow how rapidly grass grows if they are applied correctly. Using these reduces the frequency of mowing and reduces potential pollution.

How often to apply depends on how the lawn is used. Turf receiving little traffic requires only one or two fertilizations per year. Moderately used turf that receives lots of kids play and maybe occasional garden parties requires two to three applications per season. Only the most heavily used turf requires up to four or five applications. Application instructions on fertilizer bags almost always give accurate information on how much to use.

When to apply can also be confusing. During the spring, the first application should be made in May. If pre-emergent weed control is needed, apply it when the shrub forsythia blooms. This is often in April locally. For a picture of forsythia, access this URL: <http://tinyurl.com/frosythia>. You will most likely recognize the shrub. Pre-emergent weed control is often bundled with fertilizer. If the one you apply is like this, an April application is acceptable.

The next most important time to apply fertilizer is in late October or early November. For a detailed schedule, access the following fact sheet: <http://tinyurl.com/grassfert>. Happy spring and enjoy your lawn.