Eco-Friendly Lawn Care

Most have heard the phrase 'A Delicate Balance', Our SLA environment was designed by engineers and environmental scientists, some of whom were residents: The focus, to create a plan to protect our Treasure. Our Lakes are not only a major Investment but our opportunity to socially enjoy each other while also enjoying water activities. The Covenants and Bylaws direct us how to maintain this delicate balance amidst suburbia!
The original goal was to maintain as much porous surface so that water could percolate in order to be filtered prior to reaching the waterways, the more stone driveways, indigenous plants, undergrowth and trees the better. Even though our overall look has changed since inception, natural settings are still the Hallmark of our neighborhood. Keeping grass as an accent helps to maintain that balance without adversely effecting lakes. Runoff from the streets, fertilizers, chemicals to control weeds and insects all have to be balanced in order for the lakes to be kept healthy.

About Lawn Fertilizers

1. According to NJDEP: Effective January 5, 2013, all fertilizer products sold in New Jersey for turf must contain at least 20 percent slow-release nitrogen and zero percent phosphorus unless a soil test demonstrates a need for phosphorus to be added https://www.nj.gov/dep/healthylawnshealthywater/
2. Stores that sell lawn fertilizer & lawn care companies in NJ should be treating lawns in Sturbridge using correct fertilizers that decrease effects on the lakes
3. Another way to help decrease runoff of fertilizer into our waterways would be to apply liquid fertilizer instead of slow release granules. The liquid is absorbed more quickly into the ground. Since granules sit on top, the runoff during rain is more significant (ingestion can also poison animals)
4. Fertilizer is best applied when turf needs plant food and is actively growing. Blackout dates are the days that fertilizer cannot be applied. The reason for this is because the risk of fertilizer runoff or leachate into ground water is more likely when the ground is frozen.
   Homeowners: You cannot apply fertilizer after November 15 and before March 1 in any calendar year
5. Commercial fertilizers use up the humus in the soil. (The humus contains the beneficial microorganisms that produce a healthy grass
6. Commercial fertilizers are short lasting and leave a residue in the soil that cause acidic or alkali reaction that deplete the natural organisms
7. Commercial fertilizers are typically high in nitrogen (and phosphate) which can leach through the soil into our waterways causing algae blooms and poisoning fish and wildlife
8. Organic fertilizer is generally much **lower** in nitrogen/phosphate/potash, relying on soil microorganisms to convert it to lawn nutrients. They stay with the soil longer without as much leaching into our waterways.

Timely tips

The SLA Environmental Committee would like to provide you with timely tips for achieving the 'Delicate Balance' needed to maintain our Healthy Lakes.

Benefits for Growing an Eco-Friendly Lawn: Feed Organically

1. Minimizes the negative impact to our waterways and wildlife
2. Improves and restores the soil by fostering the production of beneficial organisms
3. Is SAFER for children and pets
4. Uses less water

An Eco-Friendly Lawn Can Be Achieved In Many Ways

1. Utilize SLA guidelines
    a. Limit the amount of grass to 24% of entire property as noted in the Sturbridge Lakes Covenants ARTICLE V Restrictions On Use of Property Section 1(p) http://www.sturbridgelakes.com/covenants/kad50714_2_word.htm
    b. Maintain a buffer from waterways
        i. Maintain a buffer zone of unmanaged (unfertilized) grasses or natural vegetation around the shoreline as noted in the Sturbridge Lakes Handbook http://www.sturbridgelakes.com/handbook/slresmanual.htm
        ii. Leave natural vegetation in place whenever possible
        iii. To help prevent soil erosion, plant native species such as pines, hollies, myrtle, and ivy that do not need fertilizers
2. If using grass, select a drought resistant, low fertilizer that is the best type for conditions: dry/wet, sandy/clay
3. Grass – Cut It and Leave It https://www.nj.gov/dep/dshw/recycling/Grass%20Cut%20It%20and%20Leave%20It.pdf
4. Mow grass high - Most New Jersey lawns should be mowed 2 ½ - 3 ½ inches high (like the rough beside a golf course fairway), especially in summer, to shade the soil, cool the roots, and block weed growth.
5. Minimize removal of indigenous species, trees, shrubs and underbrush
6. Test your lawn – it may not need fertilizer or may need lime to improve absorption of fertilizer
7. Add compost or humus to improve soils with poor structure
8. Use core aeration plus compost methods to help established lawns. Here is a good reference: https://www.lawn-care-academy.com/organic-lawn-fertilizer.html
9. Apply fertilizer conservatively
10. Don't fertilize prior to a rainstorm
11. Use organic fertilizer with “slow release” nitrogen and zero phosphorous/potash
12. Minimize Chemicals for treating weeds and insects
13. Utilize web sites like Rutgers Cooperative Extension when selecting turfgrass seed for home lawns https://www.njaes.rutgers.edu/fs684