

Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule for Home Lawn Fertilization¹

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As of December 31, 2007, anyone who fertilizes a home lawn will have to comply with a new state rule. This new rule will regulate what can be sold and marketed as an "urban turf" or home lawn fertilizer. Retail stores will have until June 2009 to sell their existing stock. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) is the regulatory agency charged with regulating fertilizer labeling and content and they will be responsible for enforcing the rule.

Why Is it Important To Have a Fertilizer Rule?

When fertilizers are applied to lawns at above recommended rates or at the wrong times of year, they may contribute to nonpoint source pollution of our water bodies. In an attempt to reduce this nonpoint source pollution, FDACS was instructed by the Florida Legislature to develop a rule that would reduce the amount of nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P) applied to lawns as fertilizer. See the Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule Fact Sheet by FDACS at http://flaes.org/pdf/Urban_turf_fact_sheet.pdf for more information.

How Will the Fertilizer Rule Affect a Homeowner Applying Fertilizer?

The rule will require that specific guidelines for N and P application rates be followed. Any fertilizer for sale in a retail outlet for use on urban turf (home lawns) will have directions for use conforming to these requirements. The rates allowed follow University of Florida guidelines for maintenance of healthy Florida lawns.

There will also be some other changes to the labels of urban turf fertilizers. A statement on the front of the bag will indicate the area to be covered by that fertilizer bag. A statement will also be conspicuously displayed that reads: "Do not apply near water, storm drains, or drainage ditches. Do not apply if heavy rain is expected. Apply this product only to your lawn or garden, and sweep any product that lands on the driveway, sidewalk, or street back onto your lawn or garden."

What Are the Requirements for Fertilizer Application?

If a fertilizer is listed as being a "slow-release nitrogen" fertilizer, then it can be applied at 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet of lawn. If there is no

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slow-release N in the fertilizer, then it can only be applied at 0.7 pounds of N per 1,000 square feet. Most of the retail fertilizers sold for use on lawns have slow-release N in them. Annual N rate requirements can be found in Table 1 for the most common lawn grasses in different regions of the state. For examples of how many pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet this calculates to be, go to Table 2.

Application of P is limited to 0.25 pounds of P_2O_5 per 1,000 square feet for any single application and no more than 0.50 pounds of P_2O_5 per 1,000 square feet annually. This means that you may see "no-phosphate" or "low-phosphate" fertilizers. Fertilizers that have a high ratio of P to N may not be used more than twice a year in order to remain within the new legal limits.

Are There Exceptions to the Fertilizer Rule?

Yes, there are a couple of exceptions:

- For newly planted lawns, you may apply a starter fertilizer that contains higher P within one year of planting to encourage establishment. Directions for use of these fertilizers will limit P application to no more than 1.0 pound of P_2O_5 per 1,000 square feet and are intended for one time use only.
- If your soil tests low for plant-available P, it is permissible to apply more P. Note that most Florida soils have ample plant-available P and the majority of lawns will not be adversely affected by this limitation.

What About Commercial Lawn Care Services and Golf Courses?

These applicators are covered under various Best Management Practices programs for reduction of nonpoint source pollution. The lawn care and pest control industries are required to follow the "Florida Green Industries Best Management Practices" manual, and golf courses are required to follow the "Best Management Practices for Enhancement of Environmental Quality on Florida's Golf Courses." Athletic and sports fields managers will follow

UF/IFAS fact sheet SL191, "Recommendations for N, P, K, & Mg for Golf Course and Athletic Field Fertilization Based on Mehlich 1 Extract."

Remember, for a healthy lawn, always follow the University of Florida recommendations found at www.yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu. Proper fertilizing, irrigation, and mowing practices will provide you with a healthy, happy, and Florida-friendly lawn.

In Table 2, column headings represent the percentage of N (across top) in the fertilizer bag and the number of square feet of lawn area (left-hand side) that you have. The value given is the total weight of fertilizer containing slow-release N to use for a specific square footage of lawn area. Note that numbers are rounded to the nearest half pound.

Remember too that N is the first of the three numbers on the fertilizer bag. The percent amounts in Table 2 corresponds to the first of the three numbers found on the bag. For example, use the 15% calculations when using a 15-2-15 product. These figures assume that you are applying the recommended rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet with a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer. For more information on lawn fertilization, please refer to yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu or to your County Extension Service office for lawn fertilization fact sheets.

Table 1. Recommended fertilizer rates for various established turfgrass species by Florida region.

Species/Location	N Recommendations (lbs N/1000 ft ² /yr ¹)*, **
Bahiagrass- North	2-3
Bahiagrass- Central	2-4
Bahiagrass- South	2-4
Bermudagrass- North	3-5
Bermudagrass- Central	4-6
Bermudagrass- South	5-7
Centipedegrass- North	1-2
Centipedegrass- Central	2-3
Centipedegrass- South	2-3
St. Augustinegrass- North	2-4
St. Augustinegrass- Central	2-5
St. Augustinegrass- South	4-6
Zoysiagrass- North	3-5
Zoysiagrass- Central	3-6
Zoysiagrass- South	4-6
*Range of rates accommodate variances such as shade/drought/soil quality for the respective region.	
** These recommendations assume that grass clippings are recycled.	

Table 2. Examples of proper application rates for turfgrass fertilizer products to Florida lawns by square footage and percentage of soluble nitrogen formatted in the respective product.*

Lawn (square feet)	6% N	10% N	12% N	15% N	16% N	23% N	27% N
1000	16.5 lbs.	10 lbs.	8.5 lbs.	6.5 lbs.	6 lbs.	4.5 lbs.	4 lbs.
1100	18.5 lbs.	11 lbs.	9.5 lbs.	7 lbs.	7 lbs.	5 lbs.	4 lbs.
1200	20 lbs.	12 lbs.	10.5 lbs.	8 lbs.	7.5 lbs.	5 lbs.	4.5 lbs.
1300	22 lbs.	13 lbs.	11.5 lbs.	8.5 lbs.	8 lbs.	5.5 lbs.	5 lbs.
1400	23.5 lbs.	14 lbs.	12.5 lbs.	9 lbs.	9 lbs.	6 lbs.	5 lbs.
1500	25 lbs.	15 lbs.	13.5 lbs.	10 lbs.	9.5 lbs.	6.5 lbs.	5.5 lbs.
2000	33.5 lbs.	20 lbs.	17 lbs.	13 lbs.	12 lbs.	9 lbs.	8 lbs.
2500	41.5 lbs.	25 lbs.	21 lbs.	16.5 lbs.	15.5 lbs.	11 lbs.	9.5 lbs.
3000	50 lbs.	30 lbs.	25.5 lbs.	19.5 lbs.	18 lbs.	13 lbs.	12 lbs.
3500	58 lbs.	35 lbs.	30 lbs.	23 lbs.	21.5 lbs.	15.5 lbs.	13.5 lbs.
4000	66 lbs.	40 lbs.	34 lbs.	26 lbs.	24 lbs.	18 lbs.	16 lbs.
4500	74 lbs.	45 lbs.	38 lbs.	29.5 lbs.	27.5 lbs.	20 lbs.	17.5 lbs.
5000	82 lbs.	50 lbs.	42.5 lbs.	33 lbs.	31 lbs.	22 lbs.	19 lbs.
*These recommendations assume use of a properly calibrated spreader. See www.yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu for instructions in calibrating drop or rotary spreaders.							