Too Much Fertilizer… is Pollution

Fertilizers can help plants grow, but when you use too much, fertilizers can harm water quality and aquatic ecosystems.

Fertilizers are made of nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus. When it rains, these nutrients are carried by stormwater into the nearest stream, river, or into Puget Sound. Too many nutrients in water can cause algae to grow, which uses up the oxygen in the water. Low levels of oxygen in water can lead to fish kills.

When large numbers of fish die in water, they decompose, which further decreases the amount of dissolved oxygen available in the water for other fish to breathe. This downward spiral is called a fish kill. Once a fish kill starts, little can be done to stop it.

It’s important to use “Natural Yard Care” techniques

**Build healthy soil by using use compost.** Add a layer of organic material such as leaves, wood chips, compost or grass clippings around your plants in the spring or fall. Mulch feeds the soil, conserves water and prevents weeds.

**Fertilize moderately with organic products.** Chemical fertilizers release too quickly and can wash off into streams.

### **Reduce the size of your lawn:** Trees and shrubs, once they are established, require less time and energy than lawn maintenance.

### **Mow High:** Two to three inches of grass height allow the blades to shade each other and keep moisture in. Leave the clippings on the lawn. Mulch mowers are designed to be used without a bag. They chop up and blow the clippings into the lawn where nutrients and moisture make the lawn healthier, saving you the cost of fertilizer A push mower can be used the same way.

### **If you fertilize, use organic, "slow-release" fertilizer:** Healthy lawns in the Pacific Northwest are a light meadow green. Fertilize in September when lawns are building root reserves for the next year. If you wish to fertilize twice, apply in May, but moderately, as grass grows heavily in the springtime.

### **Avoid using Weed-and-Feed on lawns:** Accept a few weeds, and crowd out problems by growing a dense, healthy lawn. Weed-and-feed-type products spread a pesticide on the whole yard, not just the weeds, and are an unnecessary expense.

### **Water deeply:** Lawns need only about one inch of water a week in summer, including rain, to stay green. The rest of the year, rainfall is enough. For lawns that don't get heavy use, you can let them go gold and dormant; water them once a month, and they'll bounce back in the fall

SOURCES: <http://www.nccleanwater.org/stormwater/sources/fertilizers.php>

<http://your.kingcounty.gov/solidwaste/naturalyardcare/lawncare.asp>