

Quick Facts: Martha's Vineyard Lawn Fertilizer Regulations

The Martha's Vineyard Fertilizer Regulations were conceived to protect the Island's surface and ground waters from impairment by minimizing fertilizer-derived nitrogen and phosphorus loading. Generally, excess nitrogen threatens coastal estuaries and drinking water, while excess phosphorus is a greater concern for fresh water ponds. Both nutrients are important for plant growth and health. In excess, they threaten the Island's drinking water, pond water and ultimately the Island's long-term sustainability and human health.

This law:

- Provides Island-Wide Lawn Fertilizer standards, granting local rule to the Island so long as Island Standards meet or exceed State-wide standards.
- Requires professional fertilizer applicators to undergo training and licensing.
- Limits the time that fertilizer can be used: fertilizer may not be applied during the "blackout dates" of November 15th - April 15th.
- Prohibits fertilizer application during or just before heavy rainfall, or onto an impervious surfaces.
- Restricts the amount of nitrogen used per application as well as the total amount for the year:
 - The annual total for all applications should not exceed 3.0 pounds nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft.
 - The maximum quantity applied should not exceed 0.50 pounds nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. in any single application, except for the spring and fall applications, which should not exceed 0.75 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. in a single application.
 - Applications must be spaced at least 4 weeks apart.
- Restricts fertilizer content
 - Fertilizer must have at least 50% of its nitrogen content in slow-release form. Organic fertilizer and compost are considered slow-release.
 - Fertilizers that contain phosphorous cannot be applied to turf except:
 - When a soil test, no more than three years old, indicates the need for phosphorus; or

When establishing or repairing turf; or

- When organic pelletized fertilizer is being applied. In this case, phosphorus can be applied provided the fertilizer's phosphorus to nitrogen ration is less than or equal to 0.25.
- Establishes buffer zones that extend between 100 to 200 feet back from the Island's water resources, the exact dimensions being dependent on the Town's individual Conservation Commission requirements. Within this zone:
 - Phosphorus cannot be applied unless a soil test indicates a phosphorus deficiency.
 - Neither nitrogen nor phosphorus can be applied within the first 10 feet from the water resource area.
 - The annual nitrogen application shall not exceed 0.5 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. This rate may be increased to 1.0 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. if a 25 ft. wide, non-lawn, fertilizer-free, vegetative strip is maintained between the water resource and the lawn.
- Sets fines for noncompliance: a written warning for both professional applicators and homeowners for the 1st offense and between \$50 and \$300 for each subsequent offense.
- Exempts commercial farms, and home landscaping and gardens
- Effective January 1, 2015