

Lauren Souza

From: Lauren Souza
Sent: Wednesday, January 8, 2025 3:23 PM
To: Steven Contente
Cc: Craig Fisher; Ed Tanner; Glenn Donovan; Lindsay Green; Jay; Lee Ann Freitas; Ray Payson; Lauren Souza
Subject: Proposed Ordinance to Regulate Usage of Lawn Chemicals
Attachments: Fertilizer Brochure_5-24-21.pdf

2025 JAN 9 AM 9:39
TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
BRISTOL, RHODE ISLAND

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Dear Steve,

The Conservation Commission, at our regularly scheduled meeting on January 6, discussed at length a Petition submitted to the Town Council for their consideration that would "regulate outdoor application of synthetic pesticides, insecticides and fertilizers" in Town. Our response, as the town's "environmental watchdog," to that proposal follows.

First, and foremost, we firmly believe fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides harm our waters and the ecosystems in them - fin fish, shell fish, and the aquatic plants they thrive in. Many synthetic herbicides can cause fish kill, and over use of fertilizer can cause algae blooms, which starve the water, and the ecosystems in it, of the oxygen needed to live. Our Harbor, Bays, the streams that feed them and the fish that live in them are, as we all know, a critical part of who we are and what makes Bristol special.

We believe a necessary first step to mitigate the damage done by (over) application of these products is public education. The more people know about the harm they cause, the more likely they are to temper or eliminate use of them. In that spirit, in 2021 we created, in partnership with Save The Bay, Save Bristol Harbor, and a professor from RWU, a trifold flyer that talks about ways to keep our waters healthy, and our yards green. It was called "Healthy Waters/Healthy Yards," and discusses "best practices" for application, and the harm that arises from incorrect use. I've attached a copy. Over 4500 of them have been distributed through an insert in the Phoenix, our presence at Farmers Markets, and placement in our Town Kiosks. It's also up on our Town website. The target audience was homeowners, but we think more needs to be done. Educating Landscapers and even the kids in schools (Save Bristol Harbor has been bringing their "Watershed Model" around to the schools for years to do just this), is necessary to stem the over application of these products.

As for an Ordinance to deter usage, we think an in depth study including measurement of the efficacy of the law, best practices and experience of other towns that have done something similar, enforcement considerations, and community input with an eye to how all this might look in Bristol, would be required before creating any Ordinance. A nearby town to start with might be Barrington. They enacted an

Ordinance in 2020 that, interestingly, requires residents to do most of what we recommended in our flyer. The recommendations for use apply from April 1 to October 31, and an outright ban on their use is required from Nov 1 to March 31. A look back at how it's worked over the last 5 years could be instructive.

In summary, we strongly believe we must do everything we can to protect our waters and ecosystems. It's necessary for our economy, our future, what keeps people coming to our town, and residents staying here. Education is an absolutely necessary first step to help make this happen. A thoroughly vetted Ordinance, with community input, could also potentially have a positive effect on keeping our waterways thriving.

Thanks for giving us the opportunity to weigh in. Of course, if you or the Council have any questions we'd be happy to help as we are able.

Take care,

Tony

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

CONCERN
the intent
STEVEN CONTENTE
Town Administrator

What YOU can do

- ✓ **DO** leave grass clippings on the lawn. This free, natural fertilizer will help keep your lawn healthy and green.
- ✓ **DO** test your soil. If the pH of the lawn is too low, the grass cannot absorb the fertilizer, no matter how much you use.
- ✓ **DO** use up to a half-inch of compost as organic fertilizer on your lawn or garden.

If you feel you must fertilize...

- ✓ **DO** fertilize sparingly. Fall is the best time to fertilize, before October 15. If you must fertilize in the spring, wait until your lawn greens up.
- ✗ **DON'T** fertilize in the summer when your lawn is naturally dormant. Also, don't fertilize from November through March.
- ✓ **DO** choose a slow-release fertilizer that release nutrients over time and are less likely to burn your lawn. Slow-release nitrogen is listed on the bag as "water insoluble nitrogen."
- ✗ **DON'T** apply fertilizer immediately before a heavy rainfall - a half-inch or more rain - which washes fertilizer off your lawn and into storm drains.
- ✗ **DON'T** apply fertilizer within 100 feet of a waterbody.
- ✓ **DO** immediately sweep up any fertilizer that is spilled onto an impervious surface such as a street, sidewalk or driveway.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Bristol Conservation Commission

bristolri.gov/conservation-commission/

University of Rhode Island Extension

web.uri.edu/coopext

For Soil Testing:

web.uri.edu/mastergardener/soil-testing-service/

Save Bristol Harbor

savebristolharbor.com

Save The Bay

savebay.org/Bay-Friendly-Living

Clean Ocean Access

cleanoceanaccess.org

R.I. Department of Environmental Management

dem.ri.gov

This brochure was produced through the collaborative efforts of the Bristol Conservation Commission, Save Bristol Harbor, and Save The Bay



HEALTHY YARDS

Healthy Waters

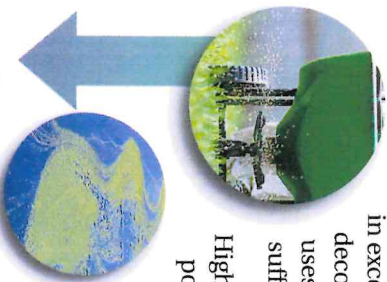
Sustainable Lawn Care

A guide for homeowners

The Problem

The nutrients in fertilizer – mainly nitrogen and phosphorus – are major contributors to water pollution and algae blooms in Narragansett Bay and its watershed.

Just as fertilizer makes your grass green, it can also make waters green by fueling rapid algae growth. Stormwater runoff carries fertilizers into nearby waterbodies, resulting in excessive algae growth and decomposition. This process uses oxygen in the water and suffocates other aquatic life.



High levels of phosphorus in ponds and lakes, caused by polluted stormwater runoff, can cause cyanobacteria—or blue-green algae—to form which can, in turn, make those waters unsafe for human or animal contact.

Elevated levels of nitrogen in coastal waters can impact shell-fishing and, in some cases, create “dead zones” and fish kills.

Save Bristol Harbor water quality monitoring volunteers have recorded high levels of nitrogen in several sampling locations along Silver Creek. **Algal blooms have been noted in Mill Pond, Silver Creek and the Kickemuit River.** More details about this monitoring can be found at savebristolharbor.com.

Solutions

The following simple steps will save you time and money AND reduce your yard's impact on water quality in both Narragansett Bay and local waterbodies.

- ◆ **Select drought- and disease-tolerant grass seed.** *Red fescue and chewing fescue are drought tolerant, tall and fine fescues require less nitrogen and need less fertilizer, if any.*
- ◆ **Set your mower at three inches.** *Grass at a height of three inches creates a healthier root system and decreases the need for water and fertilizer.*
- ◆ **Keep the clippings on the lawn.** *When left on the lawn, grass clippings reduce water evaporation and keep soil cooler during hot weather. They also return water and nutrients to the soil, reducing the need for added fertilizer.*
- ◆ **Water less often.** *Most lawns in New England will survive without watering. Healthy lawns that turn brown during hot dry periods are dormant, not dead, and will green up again during the wetter, cooler fall season.*
- ◆ **Overwatering can cause fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides to run off lawns and flow into storm drains and nearby waterbodies.** *Fertilizer on your lawn can leach into the groundwater perhaps endangering drinking water supplies.*
- ◆ **If you must water, do so before 9 a.m. to reduce evaporation and prevent sun scalding.**
- ◆ **Test your soil.** *Maintaining proper soil pH of 6.5 results in better retention and absorption of nutrients. Phosphorus should only be applied to new lawns or where a soil test indicates a phosphorus deficiency. Soil testing can be performed by URI's Master Gardeners. (See back panel.)*
- ◆ **Fertilize in early fall for best results.** *An application of fertilizer in September should be plenty for your lawn.*
- ◆ **Be careful not to apply fertilizer to sidewalks, driveways or walkways.** *Sweep up any fertilizer on paved surfaces.*
- ◆ **Opt for organic fertilizers like animal manures, cottonseed, bone meal, fish emulsion or compost.** *If you use commercial fertilizers, select those with more than 50% water insoluble fertilizer. Water insoluble fertilizers release nitrogen slowly over extended periods of time and are less likely to leach into groundwater or cause water quality problems. These fertilizers are typically labelled as “slow release” products.*
- ◆ **Only use pesticides sparingly and in a targeted manner.** *Be careful when shopping for chemicals: pesticides and fertilizers are often combined in one bag (“weed and feed”) but avoid these if you only need one or the other.*

