Fertilizer facts

April 2021

With spring right around the corner, the grass will be waking up and many of us will be looking to restart our lawncare regime that consists of regular mowing and may include one or more fertilizer applications throughout the year. As more information has become available on the potential negative impacts excessive fertilizer can have on water quality, there are a few steps you can take to minimize any unintended side effects from your efforts to keep your lawn lush and healthy.

- Fertilizer that ends up on impermeable surfaces adjacent to the lawn such as driveways, sidewalks and streets should be swept or blown back into the turfed areas where it can be absorbed into the soil and not washed into storm drains or mixed with other surface water.
- Fertilizer is calculated as a mixture of three main elements: Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P), and Potassium (K) and are listed by ratio on fertilizer bags in the format of N-P-K. Choosing a fertilizer low or free of phosphorus will reduce the impacts to water quality since this element is most commonly associated with harmful algal blooms and excessive aquatic weed growth.
- Avoid applying fertilizer immediately prior to a forecasted heavy rain event that may wash undissolved pelletized fertilizer off the intended site. Preferred conditions are dry to moderately moist soil followed by a light watering by hose or sprinkler to help start the absorption process.
- Getting a soil test to determine what type and how much (if any) fertilizer your lawn needs is an additional step that will save yourself time and money and further help prevent adverse environmental effects.