

Fertilizing Your Lawn

Fertilizer is an essential component in maintaining a healthy and attractive lawn. Its purpose is to provide nutrients to encourage healthy, active turf growth.

University of Maryland tests have determined the proper amounts of nitrogen to apply every year to keep your lawn thick, healthy, and weed free. In keeping with Maryland's nutrient management recommendations, proper amounts of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year are:

Kentucky Bluegrass	2.7 pounds
Tall Fescue	2.7 pounds
Bermuda	2.7 pounds
Fine Fescue	1.4 pounds
Zoysia	1.8 pounds

Each bag of fertilizer has three numbers listed prominently on the bag (10-6-4). These are the percentages by weight of the three main nutrients in the bag. The first number is always the percent of nitrogen; the second, phosphorous; and the third, potassium. Nitrogen is the major element responsible for growth above ground.

To determine the amount of nitrogen in the bag, multiply the percent of nitrogen times the total weight of the bag:

$$(10\% \times 40 \text{ lb. bag} = 4 \text{ lbs. of nitrogen in a 40 lb. bag}).$$

Now that you know how much nitrogen is in the bag, check to see how much coverage you will get from the bag:

1. Divide the recommended coverage by 1000
($5000 / 1000 = 5$)
2. Divide the amount of nitrogen in the bag by this number
($4 \text{ lbs.} / 5 = 0.8 \text{ lbs. per } 1,000 \text{ sq. ft.}$)
3. Now match that amount to the chart recommendations listed above to apply per year. For example, if the recommendation were 2 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. per year, in the above example, you would need 3 applications of the fertilizer per year, which is 0.8 lbs. of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft.
($2 / 0.8 = 2.5$ applications rounded up to 3)

The optimum time to apply nitrogen fertilizers to the lawn is fall, with the next best time being early mid-March to early June. All or 3/4 of your early application should be done in the fall, and the rest in late spring. Avoid fertilizing from early June to mid-August when the grass is dormant due to heat and drought. To prevent runoff, never apply fertilizers on frozen turf or impermeable surfaces.

