

Phosphorus Free Lawn Fertilizer Required in Town of Rome

By David Trudeau, Conservation Committee Member

With few exceptions, only lawn fertilizer containing 0% phosphorus is allowed in the Town of Rome. The local soils contain adequate phosphorus and excess phosphorus from lawn fertilizers can enrich our lake waters contributing to algae blooms.

Wisconsin studies found that the amount of phosphorus in lawns was 10 to 100 times that as from undeveloped wooded lots. A healthy lawn needs 20 parts per million of soil phosphorus. Twenty-five parts per billion (a quantity 1,000 times smaller) can promote excessive algae growth in lakes. A single pound of phosphorus can produce 500 pounds of algae.

The exceptions to the use phosphorus free fertilizer include use on newly established lawns during their first growing season, lawns shown to be below the UW Extension recommendations for phosphorus within the past three years as determined by a state-certified soil testing laboratory, and applications on vegetable and flower gardens, trees, and shrubs. Specifics of the Town Ordinance, including penalties, are found in Chapter 9.08(5).

The three numbers on the fertilizer bag show the amounts of Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potash. The middle number indicates the phosphorus quantity and should be zero to be sure you are buying phosphorus free fertilizer. **Using phosphorus free fertilizer is an easy way that everyone can contribute to better water quality.**