



**MARINE & ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
TOWN OF FALMOUTH**

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Dear Falmouth Property Owner:

You are receiving this letter because all or a part of your property is within 100-ft of defined Wetlands Resource Area.

The Town of Falmouth is home to more than fifteen major coastal ponds stretching from Waquoit Bay to Meganset Harbor. These estuaries help define our community and all are in various stages of decline. Too much nitrogen going through the groundwater into the water bodies is causing algae blooms, fish kills and general habitat degradation.

Individual cesspools and septic systems are the single largest cause of this decline. The second largest controllable nitrogen source impacting our estuaries is **fertilizer used on lawns**. That is why Falmouth enacted the Nitrogen Control Bylaw, Chapter 237 of the Town Code. The full text of the Bylaw can be found at <https://ecode360.com/27443489> or as a synopsis of the Bylaw on the back side of this page.

If you fertilize your lawn, or have someone else fertilize for you, this Bylaw applies to you. The key points of the Nitrogen Bylaw are as follows:

- Any portion of your property that comes within 100-ft of a protected wetland resource area as listed in the Falmouth Wetlands Regulations **bans ANY fertilizing in this 100-ft zone.**
- Areas on your property **landward of this zone may be fertilized in accordance with the provisions of the Bylaw.**
- The Bylaw **bans all fertilizing before April 15th or after October 15th, and directly before or during a heavy rain event.**

Just so you know, wetland resource areas include any bank, freshwater wetland, coastal wetland, beach, dune, flat, marsh, swamp, wet meadow, bog, vernal pool, reservoir, creek, estuary, stream, pond, lake, or ocean or land under the water bodies. These are listed in the Falmouth Wetland regulations under FWR 10.01(1)(a-d).

Thank you for your cooperation in improving the quality of Falmouth's estuaries. For more information or to report violations please call 508-457-2550.

Sincerely,

Gregg Fraser, MES Director

DETAILS ON HOW TO GROW A HEALTHY LAWN WITHOUT FERTILIZER

TEST YOUR SOIL - Your soil pH should be 6.5 to 7.0. Below that, add lime. The Master Gardeners (508-375-6690) offer soil testing clinics in spring. For more information on growing lawns without using fertilizers and pesticides, contact your local landscape contractor or garden supply house, Northeast Organic Farmers Association 978-355-2853, Master Gardeners, and search the Internet.

ENRICH YOUR SOIL - Grass grows best with 6" of topsoil. You can slowly build the depth of your topsoil by spreading a thin layer, 1/4" or less, of loam in spring or compost in fall on top of your grass. Loam containing an equal blend of silt, sand and clay works best on the Cape. Use compost from your own compost pile or from a reliable commercial source to minimize impurities. If you add nutrients to your lawn, you also can enrich soils by using organic fertilizers that contain organisms to promote soil conditioning through healthy biological activity.

USE CAPE-TYPE GRASS SEED - The best grasses for Falmouth are blends of mostly fine or tall fescues mixed with some perennial ryegrass. Compared with Bluegrass, **blends require minimal fertilizer and water**, are drought tolerant, and resist surface-feeding insects. Blends also are less susceptible to disease. If your lawn is mostly bluegrass, or has bare spots, add fescue and rye grass seed over the existing lawn. **Over seed with these blends for a thick lawn.**

MOW HIGH, RECYCLE CLIPPINGS - **Grass should be cut to about 3" long** to help retain moisture and choke out weeds. Re-sharpen blades at least once a year as dull blades tear grass. Leave clippings on the lawn – scientific studies show that clippings contain up to half the nitrogen that lawns need. Recycled clippings do not promote thatch; instead, they break down and disappear.

WATER DEEPLY – Many native landscapes do not require any water. Established lawns require only 1" of water per week, including rainfall. Watering once a week in early morning promotes deeper roots and drought resistance. Use a rain gauge or use a 1" tall can for the season to monitor rainfall. Remember to obey any water restrictions in effect.

MAINTENANCE PRACTICES - Proper de-thatching with penetrating metal blades, tines or prongs, aeration, and spring over seeding together with the practices above develop a thick grass cover in which weeds and pests do not thrive. You will probably be able to pull weeds by hand or spot treat weeds and occasional pest infestations with an organic spray.

AND NOW, WHAT ABOUT FERTILIZER - If you follow the practices above, your lawn will require little or no extra nitrogen from commercial fertilizers. If you feel you really have to use some fertilizer, within the rules of the Nitrogen Control Bylaw, use the right kind of fertilizer, at the right times of year, and in the right amounts. **REMEMBER: Don't fertilize any lawn located within 100' of wetlands - specifically the Resource Areas as defined in Falmouth's Wetlands Regulations, FWR 10.02 (1)(a - d).**

- Right Kind: It takes time for grasses to absorb nitrogen, so avoid water soluble nitrogen, and especially sprays. Instead, use granular or organic slow-release nitrogen formulations. Buy straight fertilizer – avoid combination products ("weed & feed") that spread chemicals across your entire lawn. If you need a weed killer, try gluten meal, a natural byproduct of corn processing.
- Right Amounts: When you fertilize your lawn, the Town of Falmouth strongly recommends that you apply nitrogen at the **lowest rate necessary**. A single application should not exceed 0.5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Your total annual application should not exceed 1.0 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- Right times of year: Fertilize only when the grass is growing vigorously: spring (after April 14th) and fall (before October 16th). Never fertilize in summer when grass is dormant or growing slowly. This just feeds the weeds! If you fertilize only once, do it in the fall to promote root growth for long term health.

BUYING AND APPLYING FERTILIZER - Use only as much of the bag as your lawn size needs. The label on the bag will tell you how to set your spreader for the correct rate. Ask for help if you have trouble reading the instructions on the bag!

GROW NATIVE SHRUBS - Plant low maintenance, native shrubs and plants to reduce lawn area. Contact either the Master Gardeners at 508-375-6690; the Cape Cod Conservation District at 508-771-8757 or WBNERR at 508-457-0495 for suggested plant materials.



Protect Falmouth's Waters
Stop and think before you use fertilizer!

Falmouth has a nitrogen control bylaw that applies to all bodies of water – salt, fresh, and wetlands

- Do not fertilize lawns between mid-October and mid-April.
- Never apply fertilizer on paved surfaces; remove it immediately in the case of an accident.
- Do not fertilize within 100 feet of wetlands.
- For lawns farther away from wetlands, use fertilizers sparingly or use alternatives, including yard waste, compost, or other organic materials.
- Excess nutrients on lawns flow into ponds and disrupt ecological balance.

Cape Cod's beauty, home values, and our quality of life depend on sparkling waters, not fertilized waters, choked with vegetation.

Falmouth's Bays & Ponds
THANK YOU!

For more information:

<https://www.falmouthma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/950/Fertilizer-Facts---Falmouths-Nitrogen-Control-Bylaw-PDF?bidId=>

<http://www.falmouthwaters.org/our-work/education/falmouth-friendly-lawns/>