



make a clear difference for Flathead Lake

Lake-friendly lawns

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Flathead Lake's water is so clear because its headwaters are relatively free of nutrients. Lawn fertilizers could turn it green. We fertilize our lawn, often applying more than necessary. Then it rains. Lawn roots are shallow and can't soak up all the water and fertilizer. The rain washes the excess fertilizer into streams, rivers, and Flathead Lake. This causes algae to grow, which:

- turns the water green
- coats shoreline rocks
- uses up oxygen that fish need

When we fertilize the lawn, remember we're not just fertilizing the lawn.



The state of Montana has declared water quality in Flathead Lake impaired due to human caused increases in nutrient pollution. Small, localized algal blooms are now occurring occasionally around Flathead Lake during summer and lake-wide algal blooms have occurred a few times in the past and can again with the right conditions.

Check your local regulations regarding application of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides near the lake!

WHAT CAN WE DO?

The best way to have a lake-friendly lawn is to take care of the soil:

- **Mow high.** Keep the grass at least 3 inches high and cut less than 1/3 the height during each mowing. This will increase root depth.
- **Leave grass clippings** on the lawn using a mulching mower. As grass clippings break down, nutrients are naturally recycled back to the grass plants.
- **Avoid pesticides.** They kill beneficial soil organisms which make your soil and lawn healthy.
- **Avoid herbicides.** If you choose to use them, find herbicides that are safe near water and follow directions.
- Conduct a **soil test** to understand the amount of nutrients already in the soil. Healthy soils do not need much fertilizer and excess fertilizer on the lawn will end up in the lake.
Learn more about noxious weeds management in your area through your county's weed department.
- If you feel fertilizer is necessary, choose a **zero phosphorus**, slow release nitrogen fertilizer and apply in the fall. Organic fertilizers, manure, and compost are wonderful alternatives to chemical fertilizers but must also be applied with caution.
- **Sweep up** any grass clippings, fertilizers, or spills from impervious surfaces like driveways and walkways, so they don't wash down into the lake.
- **Water deeply**, but infrequently, and early in the morning for effective water use and disease prevention.
- Consider adding **native plants** to areas of your lawn that are less used. Native plants require less maintenance, soak up excess nutrients more effectively than grass, provide privacy and beauty along your shoreline, and take up less of your time with mowing and fussing.



Deeper roots build soil, soak up nutrient pollution, and stabilize the shoreline.

HOW TO LEARN MORE

Find out more about caring for lawns, soil, and clean water.

- [Caring for shoreland lawns and gardens-University of Minnesota Extension](#)
- [Cornell Chronicle 'For a green lawn'](#)
- **The Flathead Lakers offer opportunities to learn more:**

-*Clean Water Practices Site Visits:* We will explore clean water practices that might work for you.

-*Walk and Talk Tours:* Watch for our small group tours to see lake-friendly lawns and other clean water practices in use.

-*Additional clean water practices fact sheets* and informational brochures are available on our website. Visit www.flatheadlakers.org 'Tips for Clean Water Stewards'.

- Flathead County Weed Dept.: 309 FFA Drive Kalispell MT, 406-758-5798, www.flathead.mt.gov/weeds/
Lake County Weed Dept.: 39673 County Facility Lane, Polson MT, 406-883-7330



Together, we can keep Flathead Lake blue!

FLATHEAD LAKERS | P.O. Box 70 | Polson, MT 59860 406-883-1341 | flatheadlakers.org