

Homeowner Best Practices

Reducing the amount of phosphorus entering the pond is the most important step you can take for keeping the pond healthy. Here are five things you can do today to stop the flow of phosphorus.

1. Practice Pond-Friendly Lawn Care
2. Do Not Encourage Waterfowl by Feeding
3. Grow a Native Plant Buffer
4. Use Phosphate-Free Soaps and Detergents
5. Pump Out Your Septic Tank or Cesspool Regularly

1. Practice Pond-Friendly Lawn Care (and make sure your landscaper does too!)
 Don't fertilize. The best way to reduce phosphorus is to eliminate fertilizers, which are generally rich in phosphate. To give you an idea of the magnitude of the impact: A pound of phosphorus can theoretically generate 500 pounds of algae or weeds

Test soil. Have your soil tested to determine if it is really necessary, and if it is, how much to apply.

Use phosphate-free fertilizers. Choose fertilizers that are phosphate-free. If you hire a lawn maintenance company, insist that they use a phosphate-free fertilizer (fertilizers in bags marked with a "0" for the center number, i.e. 22-0-15).

Leave the leaves. Originally our ponds were surrounded by forests, and the leaves on the forest floor protected the pond. The decomposed leaves formed humus that reduced erosion, absorbed water, and also filtered out much of the phosphate before rain runoff reached the ponds. Where you can, leave leaves on the ground, especially on pond front property.

Cut lawns to a length of 3 inches or longer. This longer length enables the grass to develop a healthier root system, which, in turn, helps the grass survive drought, disease, and insect damage. The deeper roots also do a better job of removing nutrients. Mow more often. No more than 1/3 of the grass blade should be cut off at a time. Grass adjusts better to frequent cutting than to infrequent mowing that cuts back more severely.

Leave the clippings on the lawn. They contain valuable nutrients that feed the healthy grass. Frequent cutting reduces the length of the clippings and they will sift down through the grass more easily and then decay, fertilizing the soil. Sharpen the blade on your mower. This way, the grass is cut clean. Damaged ends allow diseases to enter and also result in a more rapid loss of moisture.

2. Do Not Encourage Waterfowl by Feeding

Concentrations of waterfowl result in a large quantity of bird droppings. Droppings contain phosphorus and nitrogen, which can contribute to algae growth in water. Additionally, waterfowl droppings may also contain bacteria and viruses. Waterfowl are hosts of the familiar parasite that causes swimmer's itch. Feeding waterfowl, particularly around beaches and docks, may contribute to swimmer's itch; reducing the recreational quality of these public areas. If you are in an area where waterfowl congregate be sure to wash your hands thoroughly and make sure pets and children do not ingest waterfowl droppings.

3. Grow a Native Plant Buffer

A vegetative buffer planted along the shoreline filters out the nutrients that contribute to pond eutrophication. A minimum buffer width of 5-10 feet is recommended. However, greater buffer widths provide both increased filtration and a wildlife habitat benefit. The easiest way to establish a buffer is to let the area along your pond shore go unmowed, and let nature take its course. A quicker method is to plant native plants with deep root systems that can capture the nutrients. Grassroots typically extend down only a few inches, so other plants are preferable. Please remember before you conduct work within 100ft of a resource area (pond, stream, wetland, bank, etc.) you must contact the Conservation Commission. The Commission has jurisdiction within 100ft of resource areas. The first 35ft is a no-touch zone and does not allow new construction. The 35-50ft area is a no-build zone and the 50-100ft zone can be developed in an environmentally responsible manner.

4. Use Phosphate-Free Dishwashing Detergents, Shampoos and all other soap products.

Phosphates greater than 0.5% were banned from dishwashing detergent by the State of Massachusetts (and 15 other states) in 2010. Phosphates were banned nationwide from laundry detergents in 1993. Find dishwashing soaps and personal care soaps that contain zero percent phosphate.

5. Pump Out Your Septic System or Cesspool Regularly

Cesspools and (older type) septic system tanks can contribute significant loads of nitrates and phosphates to an adjacent pond. It is important to keep these systems well maintained. If you haven't had your tank pumped in the last two years, you should do so. When you have the tank pumped, have the pumping service assess the condition of your tank and need for pumping more frequently. More information about maintaining your septic system can be found here .

Other environmentally-friendly tips include:

Install low flush toilets.

Use low flow pressure devices to reduce the volume entering your tank.

Use a garbage can/ compost, NOT a disposal unit.

LASTLY, TALK TO YOUR NEIGHBORS WHEN YOU SEE SOMETHING WRONG. THEY MAY NOT KNOW THE HARM THEY ARE DOING TO THE POND.

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