

Help Keep Our Reservoirs Clean

The majority of the Town of Bedford is within the New York City Watershed, which provides drinking water to New York City and approximately 85% of Westchester County. Reservoirs in this area have been found to have a higher amount of phosphorus than desired, resulting in increased algae growth. Excessive algae growth causes water quality problems such as low oxygen levels and increased levels of metals and organic chemicals. This impacts drinking water quality, reduces life-sustaining oxygen to fish and other aquatic life, and impacts reservoir aesthetics.

What can residents do to reduce phosphorus loads?

Do Not Use Detergents Containing Phosphate

Septic systems can leach phosphorus into the environment. Using detergents containing no phosphate can substantially reduce phosphorus loads from your home. This applies to both clothes and dish detergents.

Be Smart About Fertilizer Use

Phosphorus fertilizer washes off lawns and gardens and flows into streams and reservoirs. Best practices include:

- Perform annual soil test and seasonal pH test before applying any fertilizer product. Ninety percent of the lawns in Westchester have adequate levels of phosphorus so it is very likely that you won't need to apply extra phosphorus in order to get a healthy, green lawn.
- Apply only the amount of fertilizer deemed necessary as a result of soil tests.
- Apply only slow-release fertilizers.
- Use products containing low concentrations of nitrogen, and no phosphorus where possible.
- Don't apply any fertilizer between December 1st and April 1st to avoid runoff issues associated with snowmelt or rains on frozen ground.
- Don't apply fertilizer to any impervious surfaces, such as pavement and sidewalks. If applied accidentally, clean it up immediately to ensure it won't be washed into streets, storm drains and/or water bodies. Do not hose down fertilizer spills on impervious surfaces.
- Avoid application within 24 hours of an anticipated rain event.
- Avoid heavy watering or irrigation for 24 hours after fertilizer application.

Phosphorus concerns with grass clippings and leaves

When rainwater carries leaves and grass clippings down streets and into lakes and ponds, they harm water quality. When leaves and grass decay, they release phosphorus.

It is suggested that residents use lawn mowers that chop up grass clippings and leave them on the lawn. These mulching mowers reduce the need for fertilizers. Place leaves along the edge of your property only in designated hamlet leaf collection areas, and only between October 1 and November 15. At any other time, all leaves must be bagged. Call the Bedford Department of Public Works at 666-7669 with any questions regarding leaf collection.

Construction Sites as a Source of Phosphorus

Phosphorus attached to sediment leaving construction sites is a major source of stormwater phosphorus. Contractors must comply with the Town's Erosion and Sediment Control standards, which can be obtained by contacting the Building Department at 666-8040.