

Fertilizer Use in South Portland

South Portland has a Landcare Management Ordinance that limits the use and types of fertilizers to cultivate clean water, healthy soils, and thriving ecosystems. For the most part, **only organic fertilizers are allowed**. Here are the rules:

Start with a soil test:

- The first step is to [start with a soil test](#). In South Portland, applications of organic fertilizers on established turf, including residential lawns, are allowed as long as a standard **soil test is conducted every two years**.

For established turf:

- Only phosphorus-free, organic fertilizer is allowed, unless the soil test indicates a need for phosphorus.
- Up to two fertilizer applications are permitted in one calendar year, and for each application, total nitrogen may not exceed 1 lb. per 1,000 square feet.
- Organic fertilizer can be used on performance turf (playing fields) as necessary, provided that total nitrogen does not exceed 4 lbs per 1,000 square feet per year.
- Applications of organic fertilizer may not contain nutrients in excess of the amount recommended by the completed soil test.

For New Development:

- Organic fertilizer with **phosphorus can be used for the establishment or re-establishment of turf** (no soil test needed).
- Unless the application is through hydro-seeding or overseeding, the fertilizer must be incorporated into the soil 2-3 inches deep.
- Fertilizer applications may not exceed 1 lb. of nitrogen and phosphorus per 1,000 square feet per application.
- Total nitrogen and phosphorus may not exceed 2 lbs. per 1,000 square feet per calendar year from the date of last application.

Restrictions:

ALL fertilizers are prohibited in the following situations:

- On frozen ground or water-saturated surfaces
- When a heavy rain event is forecast or is occurring
- During summer dormancy (generally June through August)
- On impervious surfaces (i.e. pavement, sidewalks, etc.)
- Applications with phosphorus except where a soil test indicates a need, or phosphorous is being used for new development/reestablishment

Waivers:

Synthetic fertilizers are strictly prohibited on turf, lawns, and playing fields. There are limited circumstances that allow for use of synthetic fertilizers with a waiver. You may apply for a waiver if one or more the following conditions exists:

- (1) The soil temperature is less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit and reasonable grounds exist to justify fertilizer use at that location and at that time;
- (2) The turf is experiencing high stress due to high use and must be ready for high performance play when the sports season(s) begin; or
- (3) A suitable organic product that meets the nutrient needs of the soil as specified in a soil test is unavailable.

How can I find out what products are allowed?

To determine if certain products are allowed for use, you can:

- **Check the List:** The [List of Products Compatible with Organic Landscape Management](#) identifies fertilizers that comply with South Portland's Landcare Management Ordinance. (This list will be updated periodically and should not be considered a final, complete list of products.)
- **Search the Database:** The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI) reviews and lists pesticide products which are in compliance with the City's ordinance. OMRI has a [searchable database](#), which can be searched by product, generic materials, company name, product name, or product type. (Note: this is a huge database because it includes all agricultural products.)
- **Look for the Label:** If you are shopping, another way to tell if a product is organic and therefore South Portland compliant, is if it has one of these labels visible on the product or the shelf:
 - "OMRI" listed (label)
 - "Yardscaping"-approved (stickers on each product)

Why Comply?

The overuse and misapplication of fertilizers (whether organic or synthetic) causes excess nutrient loads to enter our streams, rivers, sewers, and ultimately, Casco Bay. These nutrient loads deplete oxygen in the ocean and create harmful algae blooms, increase ocean acidification, and degrade the overall water quality.

**Organic systems thrive when soil biology is healthy enough
to support the natural cycling of nutrients!**