

Fertilizer Regulatory Program Frequently Asked Questions

Division of Regulatory Services

What does the Fertilizer Regulatory Program do?

- The Kentucky Fertilizer Law requires that all companies selling fertilizer into Kentucky register that fertilizer with our office.
- Our office reviews each label submitted for registration to ensure that it complies with the law.
- Collects samples of fertilizer from all areas of the state and analyzes those samples to ensure the fertilizer meets its guarantee; we test about 3500 official samples each year.
- Collect fertilizer tonnage data reported by companies to estimate the total fertilizer use in the state.

What is fertilizer?

- "Fertilizer" means any substance containing one or more recognized plant nutrients which is used for its plant nutrient content and which is designed for use or claimed to have value in promoting plant growth, except un-manipulated animal and vegetable manures, marl, lime, limestone, wood ashes and other products exempted by regulation by the director.

Why do we need fertilizer?

- A plant requires about 15 elements to grow and produce food. While all of these elements are present in the soil to some degree, they are not always in adequate amounts for optimum growth and yield for the plant. Using fertilizer to ensure the plant receives all of the nutrients it requires helps the plant produce a greater harvest of the food we eat; or it allows our lawns to grow strong grass and our ornamental plants to produce more of their beautiful blooms.

What do those three numbers on a fertilizer package mean?

- Those three numbers are the "grade" of the fertilizer. They tell you how much of the three primary nutrients, nitrogen (N), available phosphate (P_2O_5), and soluble potash (K_2O) are in the product (by weight).
- These numbers reflect the guarantees made by the manufacturer for that product, and mean that the fertilizer will contain "not less than" the numbers stated.
- These numbers are often referred to as the NPK of the fertilizer.

What about using animal waste for a fertilizer, isn't that just as effective as store bought fertilizer?

- All organic and/or natural fertilizers, those products used for their nutrient values to plants that are composted or waste products, including bio-solid waste, are generally lower in analysis than chemical fertilizers. More of the product will be needed to get the same effects as using a chemical fertilizer. For instance, a 50 pound bag of 10-10-10 fertilizer supplies 5 pounds of each of the primary nutrients, while a 50 pound bag of manure with a grade of 1-1-1 will supply .5 pounds of each of the primary nutrients.
- It is important to note that fresh animal waste products carry a slight risk of containing some pathogens. While the risk is slight, composting the waste before using can reduce the risk even more.

Is fertilizer safe for my dog/cat/animals to be around? What about my children?

- Always read the product information on the fertilizer you are using, if there is an issue you will likely find a caution statement there.
- Always use the fertilizer according to the directions on the packaging.

How do I know what fertilizer to use on my crops?

- We recommend that you have a soil test done to find out what nutrients you will need for the crop, or crops, you plan to grow. You'll receive recommendations regarding what fertilizers to use based on that test. Contact your [County Extension Office](#) to find out how.

What about if I don't grow crops? What if I only want to know what fertilizer to apply to my lawn?

- We recommend that you get a soil test done as well. Recommendations will be made for your lawn based on the results of the soil test. You can get that soil test done through your [County Extension Office](#), there is one in every county in Kentucky.

The grass in my lawn is yellowing, or browning, what causes that, and how can I fix it?

- Yellowing is most commonly caused by low nitrogen, but it could be low levels of iron or magnesium; or, it could be caused by other soil factors.
- Browning, especially in the summer, is most often caused by low moisture.
- Both yellowing and browning could also be caused by disease. Having a soil test done can provide you with much more information about what is causing the problem as well as giving you recommendations on how to prevent or stop it.

When should I apply fertilizer to my yard?

- For lawns the best time to apply fertilizer is in the fall, starting around Labor Day and ending around Thanksgiving (if the ground is not frozen).
- Summer applications are not recommended.

How much fertilizer should I apply to my lawn?

- Generally, in Kentucky, it is recommended that you apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn. However, each lawn fertilizer generally has directions for use on the bag. Those directions generally are in terms of "thousands of feet".

How many fertilizer applications will my lawn need during the year?

- Not that many, generally only two to three times. Follow the recommendations you received from your soil test results.

Will fertilizer help prevent weeds and insects in my yard?

- Fertilizer alone will not prevent weeds and/or insects in your lawn. However, some fertilizers also contain weed control and insect control. Look for those that are specific to your need, and follow all instructions on the packaging closely.

Can I store fertilizer to use next year?

- Yes, you can. To maintain the greatest level of nutrients in the product be sure to store it securely sealed and in an area where it will not get wet.

What brand of fertilizer does the Fertilizer Regulatory Program recommend?

- We do not endorse any fertilizer brand or company. If a company holds a current registration or license in Kentucky they have met all the requirements of the Kentucky Fertilizer Law.
- The results of all of the fertilizer tests done annually are compiled into our Annual Bulletin, the most current is found on our website, as are all of our archived bulletins.

Do you test fertilizer for farmers and individuals?

- Many of the official samples we test every year are samples that are taken from fertilizers while they are being blended for farmers; the rest are samples that we have randomly taken from packaged fertilizer being offered for sale in your local farm store or other big box stores. The results of those samples are published yearly in our Annual Bulletin.
- Our labs will also analyze samples sent to us by farmers and other consumers as “Unofficial Samples”. The form and fees associated with testing can be found on our website under “Special Analysis Request Form”.