

# Let's Keep Fertilizer Out of Drinking Water Sources

## Using Fertilizers at Home

We all want clean, safe water for our future. Protecting our drinking water sources is the first step.

Our drinking water comes from water under the ground, called groundwater, or from water in lakes and rivers, called surface water.

Let's store, handle and apply fertilizers carefully around our homes. This will help to reduce contaminated runoff, leaching, leaks and spills that can pollute our drinking water sources.



Both organic (from plant and animal sources) and inorganic (chemically derived) fertilizers are available. Most contain:

- ◆ **N** = Nitrogen - for leaf growth.
- ◆ **P** = Phosphate - for good plant health.
- ◆ **K** = Potash - for good bloom production and healthy fruiting.

Nitrogen and phosphorous are nutrients that can threaten our health when they enter drinking water sources. High nitrate levels in groundwater sources may lead to Blue Baby Syndrome. Runoff rich in nutrients can lead to algae blooms in surface water that can produce toxins harmful to people and animals. Runoff of manure fertilizers can also contain bacteria and viruses with the potential to cause serious illness if they get into untreated or improperly treated drinking water.

## Why Protect Sources of Drinking Water?

- ◆ to protect public health
- ◆ to avoid the cost and need to clean up contaminated water
- ◆ to reduce the cost of water treatment
- ◆ to eliminate the need to search for new drinking water sources when existing ones become contaminated or depleted
- ◆ to ensure a long-term supply of clean water
- ◆ to ensure an adequate water supply for economic growth

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## What can you do to keep fertilizer out of water sources?

1. **Grow Native Plants:** Most nurseries have a good selection or contact local specialty growers. These plants are genetically ready to thrive in our local climate and soils. This means less need for fertilizer and watering; and less chance of harmful nutrient-laden runoff.
2. **Set your mower higher:** Taller grass is stronger grass with deeper roots. Less fertilizer and less water will be needed.
3. **Mulch:** Plants contain nutrients. Mulching grass clippings means less fertilizer will be needed. Mulching leaves and other plant materials adds nutrients and reduces the need for fertilizer and watering.
4. **Know how much is needed and calculate carefully:** Read and follow labels for the correct amount of product to use. Over fertilizing can damage plants and lawns. Excess fertilizer can be washed away by rain and into our surface and groundwater supplies; impacting them.
5. **Consider local conditions:** Knowing local soil conditions can help you calculate fertilizer needs more accurately. Where possible, design a yard with small berms and swales to help keep runoff on the property. When you retain water on the property, less fertilizer is washed off into local waterways. Know the location of all wells and do not fertilize near them.
6. **Apply carefully:** Follow directions on product labels. Take care to apply fertilizers on target. Careless sprinkling or broadcasting means fertilizer can end up in our water sources. Do not fertilize near drainpipes as fertilizer may be easily washed away. Avoid wells and water bodies.
7. **Store carefully:** Stow fertilizers in a dry location away from water wells and waterways.
8. **Handle carefully:** Exercise caution when handling to reduce accidental leaks and spills.
9. **Time your application carefully:** Always check the weather first. Do not fertilize before a heavy rain because most of it will be washed away - money and nutrients down the drain.
10. **Tidy up:** Sweep fertilizer that lands on hard surfaces back on to the yard. This helps to keep fertilizer out of our storm drains that connect to local streams, rivers and lakes which may be used as drinking water sources.

**DRINKING WATER**  
**SOURCE PROTECTION**  
ACT FOR CLEAN WATER

**QUINTE**  
**REGION**

### Approved Quinte Region Source Protection Plan

*The Quinte Region Source Protection Plan contains policies designed to help keep fertilizer and other pollutants out of our drinking water sources. For more:*

**[QuinteSourceWater.ca](http://QuinteSourceWater.ca)**