

Charlotte Sun -- OUR VIEW Learn, follow local fertilizer use regulations

OUR POSITION: *The connection between fertilizer and red tide is tenuous, but it's there. Don't make the problem worse.*

The God-awful bout of red tide growing in intensity in recent weeks along the shoreline of Southwest Florida reminded us of something found in our own back yards that may contribute to the problem.

Fertilizer.

In case you missed it, June 1 was the beginning of the annual "no-fertilizer" season here.

That means a black-out on the application of all fertilizer containing the nitrogen and phosphorus that can run off the landscape and into the canals, creeks, bays and, eventually, the Gulf.

The same nitrogen and phosphorus that makes your lawn grower quicker and your plants grow stronger other times of the year also feed aquatic plant life when it washes off during the rainy season.

That's a bad thing.

This form of pollution degrades our waterways. It throws the natural balance of the marine ecosystems out of whack.

It is not good, and it is not necessary.

Homeowners may believe their yards are being helped by artificial stimulants, but fertilizer isn't necessary this time of year. Local ordinances that regulate fertilizer are well-designed to provide all the nutrients that lawns and plants need this time of year.

They don't need an injection of nitrogen. They don't need a super-charge of phosphorus. They need water. Perhaps some iron. But that's about it.

In fact, too much fertilizer (in the form of nitrogen and phosphorus) only stimulates diseases and pests that can damage a fine patch of lawn.

And then, there's the fact that fertilizing from June 1 to Sept. 30 is equivalent to opening your bank account and dumping cash on the ground. It's a waste. And it is potentially harmful to the larger environment we all enjoy.

As for red tide, the science is inconclusive.

The authority, Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, states on its website, "In contrast to the many red tide species that are fueled by nutrient

pollution associated with urban or agricultural runoff, there is no direct link between nutrient pollution and the frequency or severity of red tides caused by *Karenia brevis*.

“Florida red tides develop 10-40 miles offshore, away from man-made nutrient sources. Red tides occurred in Florida long before human settlement, and severe red tides were observed in the mid-1900s before the state’s coastlines were heavily developed.”

Sounds reassuring.

But the final sentence is a kicker: “However, once red tides are transported inshore, they are capable of using man-made nutrients for their growth.”

And that’s when the bloom really blooms. And that’s when it most affects the humans living on or visiting the shore.

Be aware that all communities of Southwest Florida now have special fertilizer ordinances. They vary a little from place to place, but all are designed to limit (again) nitrogen and phosphorus.

For specifics, check out your local ordinance online. But recognize that all ordinances ban widespread landscape application of nitrogen and phosphorus. That applies to individuals and landscape companies.

Now, it is unlikely the Fertilizer Cops will come knocking at the doors of fertilizer scofflaws. Still, it’s the law. Follow the law. Save yourself money. Help preserve the clean water we all appreciate so much. And don’t feed the Godawful red tide algae.