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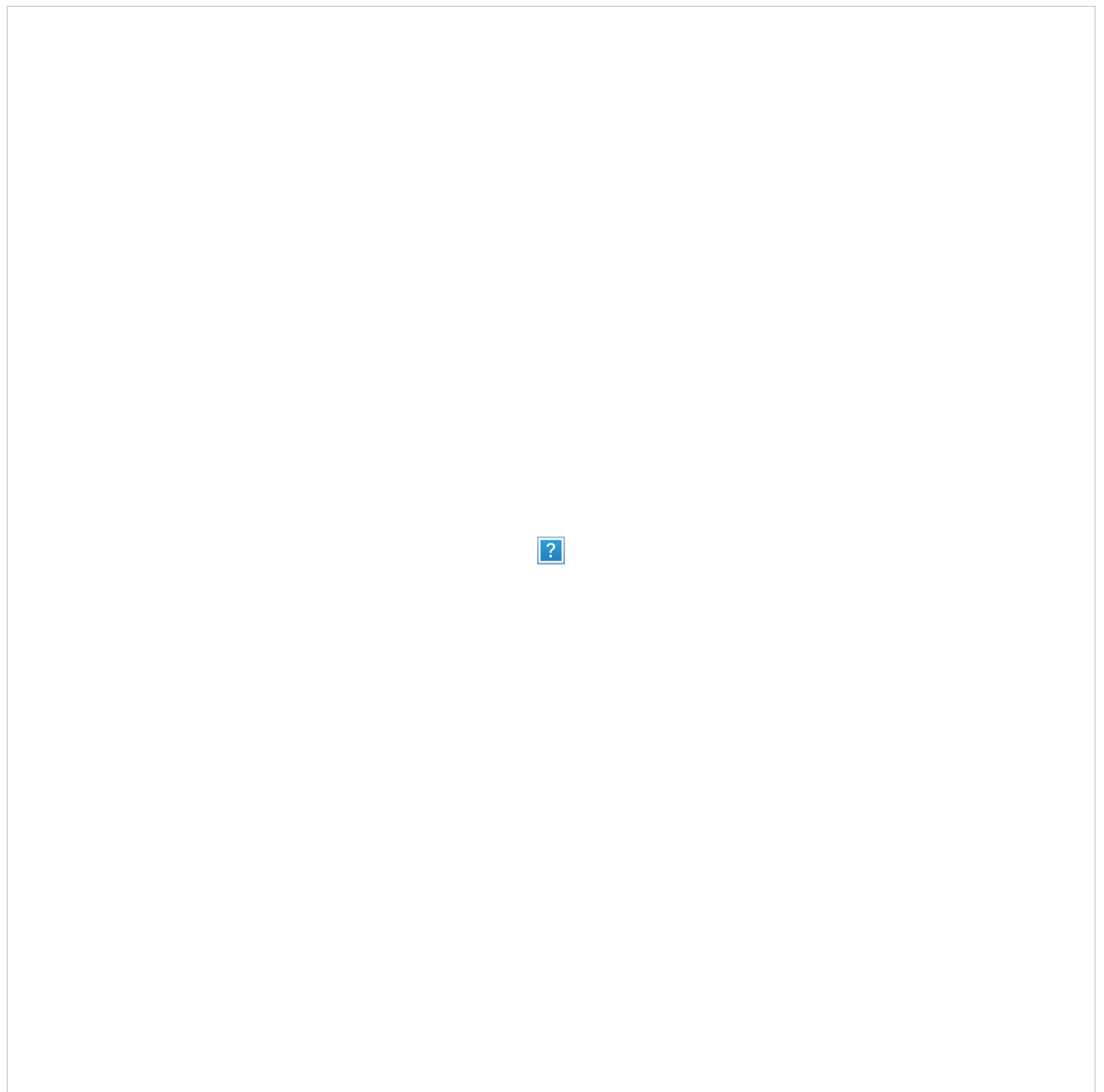
Limit Lawn Fertilizer and Save Money

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A lush green lawn around your house is inherently American, ranking right up there with baseball and apple pie. Americans think lawns are essential for their homes, but they're also largely unsatisfied with the grass and so they over-fertilize.^[i] Yet too much lawn fertilizer causes the roots of the grass to shrink and shrivel up, making the lawn look parched, leading to more irrigation and more fertilization. It's a vicious cycle you can stop with our guide to knowing how to save money by fertilizing less.



Quick Facts: Lawn Fertilizers and the Environment

- **50,000 square miles = more than Pennsylvania:** That's how much space lawns take up in America, equivalent to 32 million acres, or more than the entire state of Pennsylvania, 80% of which is residential.^[ii]
- **70 million pounds of chemicals:** This is the total chemicals Americans apply to make their lawns pretty every year.^[iii]
- **\$95 per person spent on lawn chemicals:** The lawn care industry is worth over \$30 billion annually.^[iv] When you over-use lawn fertilizer you waste money on fertilizer, water, and lawn mower fuel.
- **Contaminated drinking water, algae blooms:** Lawn fertilizers contain nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium that leach into groundwater or wash away into storm drains,^[v] which contaminates drinking water and creates algae blooms in lakes, ponds and bays.^[vi]

Take Action! Lush, Inexpensive Lawns

1. **Adjust your soil's pH:** Healthy lawns depend on healthy soil, so get yours professionally tested to find out the pH levels. If it's below 6.0, treat with lime (40 pounds per 1,000 square feet of grass). If it's above 7, treat with gardener's sulfur.
2. **Mow high:** Use your mower's highest setting, since slightly taller grass shades out weeds and keeps the soil moist. Plus, short-cut lawns don't develop deep roots which makes them weak and more susceptible to pests and disease, and increases watering needs.
3. **Use a mulching lawn mower to fertilize with clippings:** These mowers produce very fine clippings that you leave to provide nitrogen to the soil without smothering your lawn. Over the course of one mowing season, that's like one application of fertilizer.
4. **Water infrequently:** Only water your lawn when the blades start to curl, which is what precedes turning brown. This forces

the grass to put down deep roots, which means the grass will out-compete weeds with shallower roots and also be able to survive dry conditions.

5. **Fall is for fertilizing:** If you do need to fertilize your lawn, do it in the fall and not the spring. In the spring, you're just feeding weeds that are eager to start the season, but in the fall they're winding down and not as interested.
6. **Aerate compacted areas:** If there are places in your lawn that get a lot of foot traffic, the soil can become compacted which prevents water, nutrients, and air from getting down into the soil. If there are places where water pools instead of sinking down immediately, you should probably aerate. Healthy soil will help achieve a healthy lawn. See Virginia's Cooperative Extension on [Aerating Your Lawn](#).
7. **Top-dress with compost:** If you've gone to the trouble of keeping a compost pile, why not use it to improve your lawn? This is known as top-dressing and can significantly contribute to the health of your grass. See Dummies.com for [How to Top-Dress Lawns with Compost](#).
8. **Use compost tea:** Compost tea, a liquid fertilizer made from compost that gets nutrients into the soil super-fast, is said to make lawns grow slower, need less mowing, and use less water.
9. **Choose native grasses:** Seed your lawn with a **native grass variety** that originated in your part of the country because it's already suited to your local growing conditions.
10. **Political action on lawn chemicals:** The EPA has simply been too lenient when it comes to chemicals that can be put on residential lawns. Find out more from the Natural Resources Defense Council in [The EPA's Pesticide-Protection Failure](#).

Dig Deeper: Organic Lawn Care

- OrganicLawnCare101.com offers [A Homeowner's Guide to Organic Lawn Care](#), an entire website devoted to the topic, including all the tips you'll need to reduce the need to fertilize with chemicals.
- The Extremely Green Gardening Company offers a good [Organic Lawn Care Guide](#) geared towards cool-season grasses such as tall fescues, ryegrasses and kentucky bluegrass.
- The Daily Green offers a full [21 Expert Organic Lawn Care Tips](#) that will change the way you think about your soil and your lawn.

Image by [stevendepolo](#)

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