

Should I put herbicides and fertilizers on my lake property if few of my neighbors do?

Use of chemical in accordance with their labels is an acceptable practice. In reality, if you are trying to control weeds in your lawn, or add nutrients so the grass grows faster and thicker, the choice conforms to your own ethic.

Absent a permit, you may not use herbicides or algacides in the lake. Lawn chemicals should be used sparingly – as labelled – for the first flush (rain) or too heavy of an application will move the chemical to the water. Not that your once a year application will have any remarkable effect on either the lawn or lake, but you will waste your money and time. The lake area is rural; weed seeds are going to blow in from the fields and your neighbors.

Most of the grasses and weeds that you see have the advantage. They (*dandelion, timothy, many ragweeds, ground ivy*) are mostly European and Asian, arriving with our early immigrants. The plants that you see green up first in the fields and forests seize the advantage of light and moisture to establish their presence seed and rootstock first. Many also stay green longer. In this way they crowd out native species. If you can remember Howdy Doody, you probably don't recall seeing *Phragmites*, purple loosestrife, buckthorn, and garlic mustard as a kid. But these have since out competed natives such as the cattails that supported red winged blackbird nests (*if there are fewer birds, are there today more mosquitoes?*). Your lawn is the same...weeds out-compete the grass.

Rain and snowmelt runoff carries into our water ways free nutrients and those bound to our clay soils. Once in the water, phosphorus can cause algae that turn waterbodies green, degrading drinking water, and encourage growth of weeds, that as they decompose, use up vital oxygen that fish need to breathe.

New York essentially prohibits use of lawn fertilizers that contain phosphorus. Fertilizer labels have three bold numbers. The number in the middle is the percentage of phosphorus (P) in the product, such as: 22-0-15 (N-P-K). The 2012 Dishwasher Detergent and Nutrient Runoff Law prohibits the use of P fertilizers unless a new lawn is being established or a soil test shows that the lawn does not have enough phosphorus.

This ban elicited complaints of waterspots on 'cleaned' glasses and less white whites as detergents were made less effective by elimination of P. Nevertheless, like the 1972 Water Pollution Control Act and Clean Water supplements that caused our upstream communities to build sewer treatment plants, our lake is better for the nutrient reduction. (See the OLA Position Paper on Phosphorous).

The irony of our cleaner water since sewers and septic tanks were re-engineered around the lake is that we have more "weeds" in the lake. But that is another story.

Consider planting your shoreline with native, butterfly-friendly flowering plants like Joe Pye Weed, eastern bluestar, milkweed, and Carolina lupine. Learn to live with our immigrants. Cut your lawn less frequently. Go fishing or tubing! But please enjoy and protect Oneida Lake.