

Frequently Asked Questions for Professional Fertilizer Applicators and Landscapers

Q. I apply fertilizer as part of my job. What training, certificate, license, etc am I required to have?

A. Each fertilizer applicator must take the **Green Industry Best Management Practices Training (GI-BMP)**. It is offered through the University of Florida Extension Service. At the end of the training is a test each applicator must take and pass to receive their certificate. A copy of the certificate is required to apply for the Limited Commercial Fertilizer Applicator license. Each professional applicator in the City of Port St. Lucie must have this license to receive or renew your Business Tax License (BTR). Visit http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/professionals/BMP_overview.htm for the class schedule and registration. For questions call UF-IFAS extension office at 772-462-1660. The class is also available online at <https://gibmp.ifas.ufl.edu/gibmp/study/featureCourses-frame.faces>

After you receive your GI-BMP certification, apply for the FDACS Limited Commercial Fertilizer Applicator license with this application: <http://forms.freshfromflorida.com/13677.pdf>

Q. I am an independent landscaper. I do not work for a big landscape company. Am I required to have the Fertilizer License mentioned above?

A. Yes. Each person who applies fertilizer as part of a landscape service must have the FDACS Commercial Fertilizer Applicator License.

Q. What do I tell my customers who say their lawn is going to turn brown without regular fertilizer application?

A. In St Lucie County soils are rich in phosphorous. There are extended release fertilizers available to provide nitrogen over a longer period of time. Micronutrients such as iron, magnesium, and potassium can be used to green-up lawns without the excess growth nitrogen provides. Additionally, compost based products are encouraged to improve soil quality.

Q. How do I know which fertilizer to use at what time of the year?

A. The best way to know is by consulting the literature and information provided from your GI-BMP course and the City of Port St. Lucie Fertilizer Ordinance. Fertilizers with phosphorous (N-P-K) are not allowed unless you or your customer has obtained a soil test that indicates a phosphorous deficiency. The results of the soil test must be made available at all times. From October 1 – May 31 granular fertilizers must contain at least 50% slow release nitrogen. From June 1 - September 30 fertilizers with nitrogen or phosphorous are not allowed, during this period compost and micronutrient fertilizers (Fe, Mg, Mn, K) are recommended.

Q. If the Fertilizer Ordinance says I cannot use fertilizer, why are the stores still selling it?

A. Recent laws prevent City governments from regulating when and what fertilizers retailers can sell. It is the responsibility of the applicator to abide by all regulations set forth in the City of Port St. Lucie fertilizer ordinance. Violations of the fertilizer ordinance can result in monetary fines.

Q. How will people know if I am certified in Best Management Practices?

A. You shall carry your license with you at all times while applying fertilizer, also there is a certification list that residents/commercial applicators can check at http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/professionals/certification_lists/cert_county_name.shtml

Q. How much fertilizer does the Ordinance allow me to apply?

A. Fertilizers applied shall not be applied more than the Fertilizer Guidelines for the Southern Region of Florida under the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Rule 5E-1.003 F.A.C. during any one calendar year to a single area.

Q. What are organic fertilizers? Are they a better choice?

A. Yes, organic fertilizer nutrients come from only the remains or by-product of an organism. Organic fertilizers rely on soil microbes to break them down to release nutrients. Usually, this occurs over a long period of time. Organic fertilizers typically have a much higher slow release rate than that of traditional quick release fertilizers. Lawns and landscapes grown with organic fertilizers can produce plants with a higher tolerance for drought, disease, and insect resistance.

Q. Does the Fertilizer Ordinance affect potted plants?

A. No, the Ordinance doesn't apply to potted plants.

Q. Why is using a slow-release fertilizer better than a regular (quick-release) form?

A. A slow-release form controls the nitrogen's release, which lessens the chance of nutrients getting into the water resources (groundwater, lakes, bays, etc). Slow-release forms also need fewer applications because they release the nitrogen slowly over longer periods of time. Regular (quick-release) fertilizer is more likely to reach water resources as they release nitrogen very quickly and are more susceptible to runoff and leaching into groundwater. However, it is important to note that any type of fertilizer that lands on hard surfaces is a threat to water quality so always sweep or blow granules back into the landscape.