Matt Lenhardt, Commercial Horticulture Agent *FS# CH0114*

Steps to Take When Fertilizing Your Turf

Choosing the correct amount of fertilizer to apply to your lawn begins with knowing your turf's yearly nutrient requirements. Most common warm season turf in Florida such as Bahia, Bermuda, St. Augustine, Centipede, and Zoysia grass vary in the amounts of nutrients, such as nitrogen, needed for optimum growth. These requirements can also vary depending on the length of the growing season in the area of the state you live in: either in north, central, or south Florida. Designing a fertility management schedule for one type of turf is straightforward, however, if you are maintaining two types of turf on the same property (for example Bahia in the front yard and St. Augustine in the back), you may need to fertilize them separately. If your lawn has more than one type of grass growing in it (for example, Bermuda grass has encroached into your St. Augustine), it is recommended to choose one of the turf species in your lawn that you are wanting to grow, and fashion your fertility management program around that one turf.

Once you have determined yearly nutrient requirements, figure the square footage of your lawn using a measuring wheel. Knowing the total area of a property will not only help with applying the correct amounts of fertilizer, but also help landscape professionals to competitively bid commercial jobs. Calibrating your spreader is an equally important step to apply the correct amounts of fertilizer or other granular products to your lawn. When using the fertilizer spreader try to keep a consistent walking speed; increases or decreases in speed will change the amount of fertilizer applied over a given area. Proper irrigation practices are also needed in order to water in fertilizer to the root zone for efficient nutrient uptake. Overwatering fertilizer has the potential of moving nitrogen and other nutrients pass the root zone too quickly, limiting nutrient uptake and increasing leaching. Also, using a deflector shield when needed is a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to apply fertilizers to the target areas, especially avoiding waterways and storm-water drains. More information on turf nutrient requirements can be found at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep435.