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## **Controlling Algae**

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We've all seen it happen. Our community's lake looks great and then a little bit of green scum begins to form at the surface. Suddenly, the scum balloons into a huge blanket, and the lake becomes a mess.

Having a lake adds a lot to a community, and landscaping practices can affect whether it is nice or yuck. In order to keep a lake looking nice, it is important not to give the algae extra food. Algae really enjoy munching on nitrogen and phosphorus that is present in fertilizer and grass clippings because they need these nutrients just like grass and ornamental shrubs. When algae are given large amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus, algal blooms form that may negatively impact the pond along with making it unattractive.

Algal blooms cover the surface of the water and decrease the amount of dissolved oxygen available to aquatic organisms. This can lead to fish kills due to algae consuming oxygen instead of producing it when sunlight is unavailable. When this oxygen depletion occurs, fish die. In addition, the low dissolved oxygen problem also may be compounded by the death of oxygen producing aquatic plants due to blooms blocking sunlight to them.

To keep these negative effects from occurring in your lake, landscape maintenance practices should be adjusted.

- Don't over fertilize. Follow University of Florida recommendations for your particular grass species. They are available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> and from your local extension service.
- When fertilizing near a lake, leave a "Ring of Responsibility" at the water's edge. This is an untreated area. If applying a granular fertilizer with a spreader that has a deflector shield or a liquid fertilizer, the untreated area should extend at least 3 feet from the edge of the lake. If there is no deflector shield on the granular fertilizer spreader, the untreated area should extend at least 10 feet from the edge of the lake.
- Properly irrigate. Irrigate 2 times per week from March to October and 1 to 2 times every 2 weeks from November to February. Apply 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water during irrigation.
- Cut grass at the correct height for your species of grass. This information is available online at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu> and from your local extension service.
- Make sure grass clippings do not blow or get deposited into the lake. This includes not sweeping or blowing grass clippings into the street. The next rainstorm or irrigation will likely carry them into the lake.
- Leave grass clippings on the lawn for "grasscycling." When you mow regularly, clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients that fertilize the lawn. Grasscycling can supply about a quarter of the fertilizer needed each season.

By adopting some of these practices, you can help improve your lake's appearance and keep it from being an unlimited buffet for the algae. For more information, please contact your local University of Florida County Extension Service.