

Sea Grant Extension
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As January comes to a close, believe it or not it is time to start thinking about your spring fertilizing schedule. If you need to add lime to the pond, it is best to get that done soon to have it in place before the fertilization begins at the end of February. It will take about six weeks to get the full effect of the liming application so you still have some time.

Remember only use agricultural limestone in ponds.

Every year I meet pond owners who tell me that they fertilize their ponds, but don't use a schedule. This all too often leads to alternately feeding and starving the pond which is worse than not fertilizing the pond at all. Generally, ponds in this area are fertilized starting at the end of February or beginning of March. If your pond is heavily affected by spring rains, this can be delayed a month to avoid adding nutrients that are immediately washed out of the system. Now back to the idea of a schedule... A loose schedule (because every pond is different) is a double application of fertilizer to begin with (end of February). Then, a single application after two weeks, followed by a single application two weeks after that. By now the pond is probably beginning to bloom. Single applications are made every three weeks for three applications. At this point, the bloom should be stable enough to fertilize with a single application once a month to maintain the bloom. At the end of October, stop fertilizing. Here is the important part... because every pond is different; all of these applications are done **IF** the pond needs it to maintain

the bloom. How do you know if a pond needs to be fertilized? That is determined by the water clarity, basically how far down into the water can you see, or technically, the 'Secchi depth'. If the Secchi depth is greater than 24 inches, the pond needs to be fertilized. If it is less than 12 inches, the bloom is too dense and you should consider making arrangements to provide aeration at night. The ideal reading is 18-24 inches in which case, you do nothing and enjoy your pond until the reading changes.

It is also important to avoid fertilizing any pond that has a weed problem. This will only intensify the problem and make it harder to treat later. If you fertilize on a schedule, apply the recommended rates, and the pond does not respond by blooming, the alkalinity should be measured.

Other items on the list for pond managers at this time of year include a close look at any weed problems the pond may have developed last year. How did they do over the winter? Did the cold weather knock them back enough for you to be satisfied? If not, early spring is the best time to treat weeds. They are growing actively and are more susceptible to chemical applications, and water temperatures at this time of year are more conducive to managing dissolved oxygen levels.

For additional questions or information, contact P.J. Waters, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, 438-5690.