

# ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

## Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest. Email or mail your questions to:

[info@sprigsandtwigs.net](mailto:info@sprigsandtwigs.net) or

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**Question #1 this Week:** *I recently heard about a ground water contamination problem in Charleston, RI. Can you shed some light of what is going on?.... Dive*

**Linda's Answer:** Nitrate contamination of private and public well water is so severe in areas around Charleston, RI. that other sources of drinking water are needed now or are close to being needed. While the major problem is sewage waste disposal through septic systems, a significant source of the contamination is coming from lawn fertilizers applied by both landscaping companies and homeowners. Synthetic chemical fertilizers that are commonly used put way too much nitrogen and phosphate into the soil. Only 35% of synthetic lawn fertilizers ever reach the grass roots, the rest leaches through the soil into streams, lakes and drinking water supplies. Of the 35% of the fertilizers that reach the grass roots, only a small fraction of that is needed. The Town of Charleston is advising homeowners: "A pristine, green, weed free lawn is not desirable for our drinking water. The Town of Charleston strongly recommends that fertilizer NOT be applied to lawns due to increasing levels of nitrogen in our drinking water," and their own Potable Water Working Group feels strongly that fertilizers should be completely banned. The town is working with all commercial landscaping companies that serve their area to institute a process to minimize nitrates in their drinking water. The Charleston process has features that Sprigs & Twigs has embraced for a number of years in our Organic Lawn Care Program:



- Use slow release fertilizer with water insoluble nitrogen having Nitrogen/Phosphate/Potassium (N/P/K) levels of 6-0-6,
- Do a soil test prior to adding anything to the soil,
- Cut lawns with a high setting on your mower (Sprigs & Twigs recommends no shorter than 3 1/2") to reduce weeds, as higher grass means cooler soil so weeds don't germinate,
- Mulch your grass clippings back into the lawn; don't bag them,
- Do a lawn aeration and overseeding annually to thicken and build a healthy lawn,

Chemical lawn fertilizer contamination of the environment is a serious and increasing problem. The Sprigs & Twigs Organic Lawn Care Program is the safe, effective and sensible approach to lawn care. The science and experience is there, now it's up to you. If you would like more information about our Organic Lawn Care Program or if you would like a copy of our brochure "It's Time To Stop the Madness of Chemical Lawn Care!" call or send us an email.

*Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.*

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