

ABOUT THE PHOSPHORUS AWARENESS PROJECT

The Phosphorus Awareness Project is a community education campaign aiming to reduce nutrient loads in the Swan-Canning catchment. The campaign educates the community, schools, Local Government and high nutrient use industries about the impact of too many nutrients in the rivers and wetlands and how to reduce the levels.



The project is managed by the South East Regional Centre for Urban Landcare and is supported by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

The project seeks to promote:

- appropriate fertiliser practices for the soils of the region - Fertilise Wise;
- the growing of local native plants
- the use of phosphorus-free detergents, especially in unsewered areas;
- awareness of the high level of nutrients contained in dog poo, grass clippings, deciduous leaves and in bread fed to water birds.

It also seeks to make people aware of the connection between their backyards, the stormwater drainage system and the rivers and wetlands.



ALGAE BUSTER



PHOSPHORUS AWARENESS PROJECT

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SUPPORTED BY



Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions



Phosphorus Awareness Project

Improving the health of wetlands and the Swan and Canning Rivers



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OUR RIVERS AND WETLANDS ARE GOING DOWN THE DRAIN

The Swan and Canning Rivers and many wetlands are suffering from the effects of high nutrient levels, particularly phosphorus and nitrogen, which leads to regular, sometimes toxic, algal blooms in the warmer months. High nutrient levels in the rivers are a result of overuse of nutrients in the catchment.

Nutrients, phosphorus and nitrogen, are plant nutrients that are naturally present in our waterways and soils in very low concentrations. The problem is that nutrients accumulate as a result of human activity. We are using too many nutrients in our daily lives.

Only low levels of nutrients can be retained in the majority of Perth's porous, sandy soils as they contain few metals, clay, silt or organic matter to bind the nutrients, particularly phosphorus. Nutrients just wash out with water (rain or over-watering) and may be leached into ground and surface waters.

Even in those areas of the catchment where the soil is heavy clay and phosphorus retention is greater, there are still problems. Surface run-off and soil erosion causes the release of phosphorus into the rivers and wetlands.

Nutrients also get washed down stormwater drains which end up, untreated, in our rivers and wetlands.

SOURCES OF NUTRIENTS

The nutrients that enter the Swan and Canning Rivers come from:

- fertilisers;
- grass clippings;
- deciduous leaves;
- detergents;
- sewage;
- intensive agriculture;
- dog poo; and
- bread fed to water birds.



ALGAL BLOOMS

Algae are plants that grow naturally in our rivers and wetlands and are an important part of the river ecosystem. However, algae use excess nutrients to grow and multiply rapidly to large numbers, thriving when the weather is warm and sunny and the water flow is slow. This is known as an algal bloom and they are undesirable because:

- they can be toxic to humans and animals and can cause skin irritations
- they kill fish by starving them of oxygen (when algae decomposes)
- are unsightly and foul smelling
- prevent recreational use of the river.

HOW TO HELP OUR RIVERS AND WETLANDS

Cleaning up the rivers and wetlands is simply a matter of reducing nutrient loads in the Swan-Canning catchment.

There are many things you can do to reduce the input of nutrients most of which will take little effort and even less time including:

- Fertilise Wise - use Fertilise Wise endorsed effective and responsible all purpose fertilisers.
- If you must use a chemical fertiliser, use a complete fertiliser with a Nitrogen to Phosphorus to Potassium (N:P:K) ratio of 10:1:6. Apply sparingly in spring or autumn only.
- Don't fertilise near waterways or road verges
- Improve your soil by adding organic matter or clay
- Grow local native plants
- Compost your garden waste
- Don't let grass clippings, leaves or soil go down the drain
- Take the catcher off the mower - recycle the nutrients
- Don't over-water
- Use P free detergents (read the labels)
- Wash your car on the grass, not the driveway
- Pick up after your dog on walks
- Do not feed bread to water birds
- Join the Phosphorus Awareness Project and spread the message about saving our rivers and wetlands.



We all have a responsibility to reduce nutrient loads to the rivers and wetlands to protect their future health and our recreational use.