

UNDERSTANDING FLORIDA FERTILIZER PRACTICES



ABOUT

Researchers at the University of Florida conducted a statewide survey to assess Floridians' behaviors and practices surrounding residential fertilizer application and to gauge their awareness of and adherence to residential fertilizer ordinances.



OVERVIEW

- 929 Floridians completed the survey.
- The survey focused on the following topics:
 - Homeowners association (HOA) involvement in the application of fertilizer
 - Current landscape condition
 - Current fertilizer practices
 - Perceptions of current and future implementation of fertilizer best management practices
 - Awareness and adherence to local fertilizer ordinances.



ABOUT THE STUDY

Data were collected between March 7 and March 26, 2024 by the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in collaboration with the UF/IFAS Center for Land Use Efficiency. This survey was conducted within Florida and had 1,173 total respondents, with 929 valid completed surveys used during analysis. Participants were required to be a Florida resident, over the age of 18, and have a lawn that is fertilized.



HOW DO FLORIDIANS FERTILIZE?

47%

Fertilize their lawns themselves.

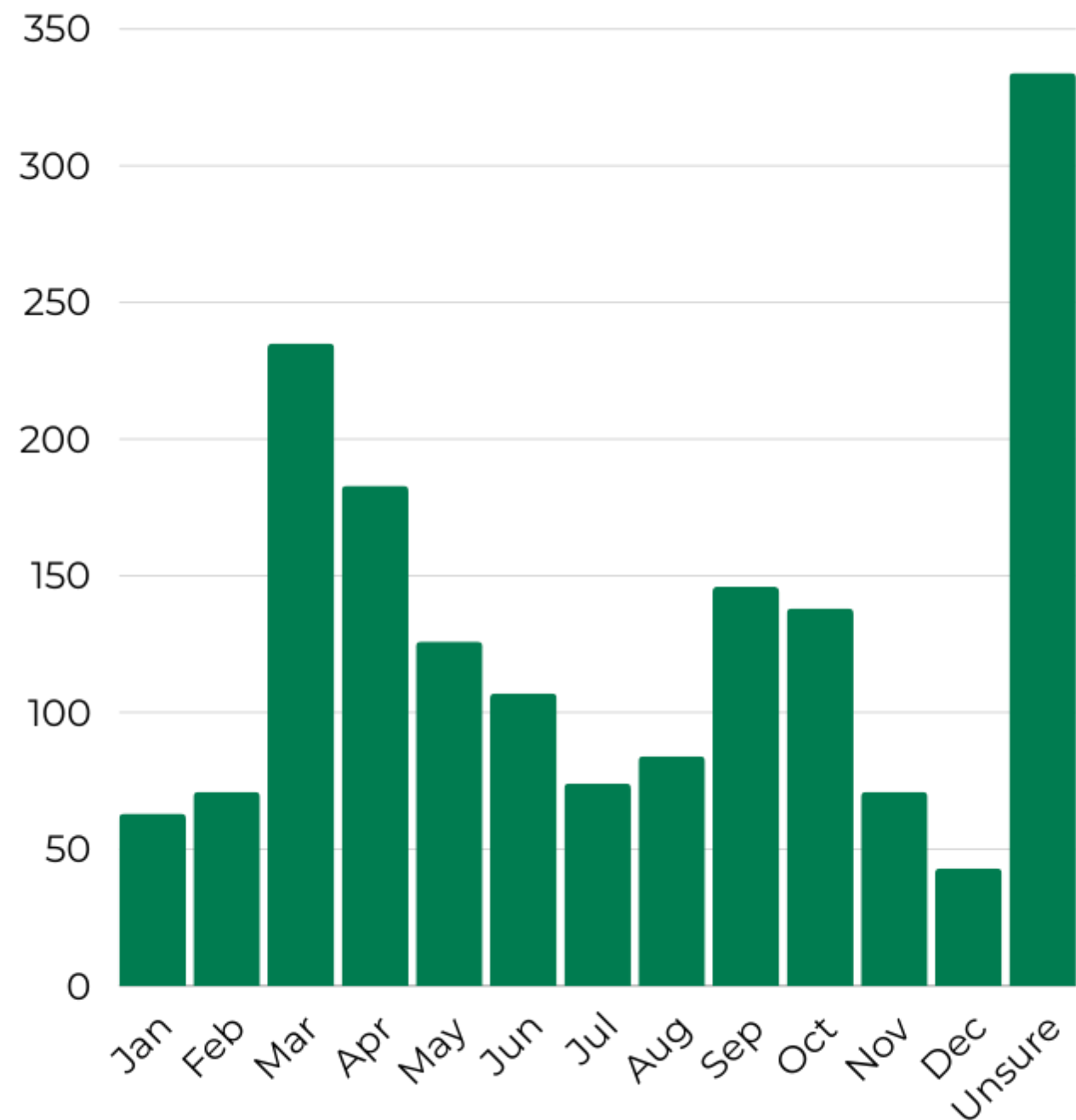
19%

Hire landscape professionals to fertilize.

18%

Report that their HOA manages fertilizer application.

WHEN DO FLORIDIANS FERTILIZE?



TOP MONTHS FOR RESIDENTIAL FERTILIZER APPLICATIONS

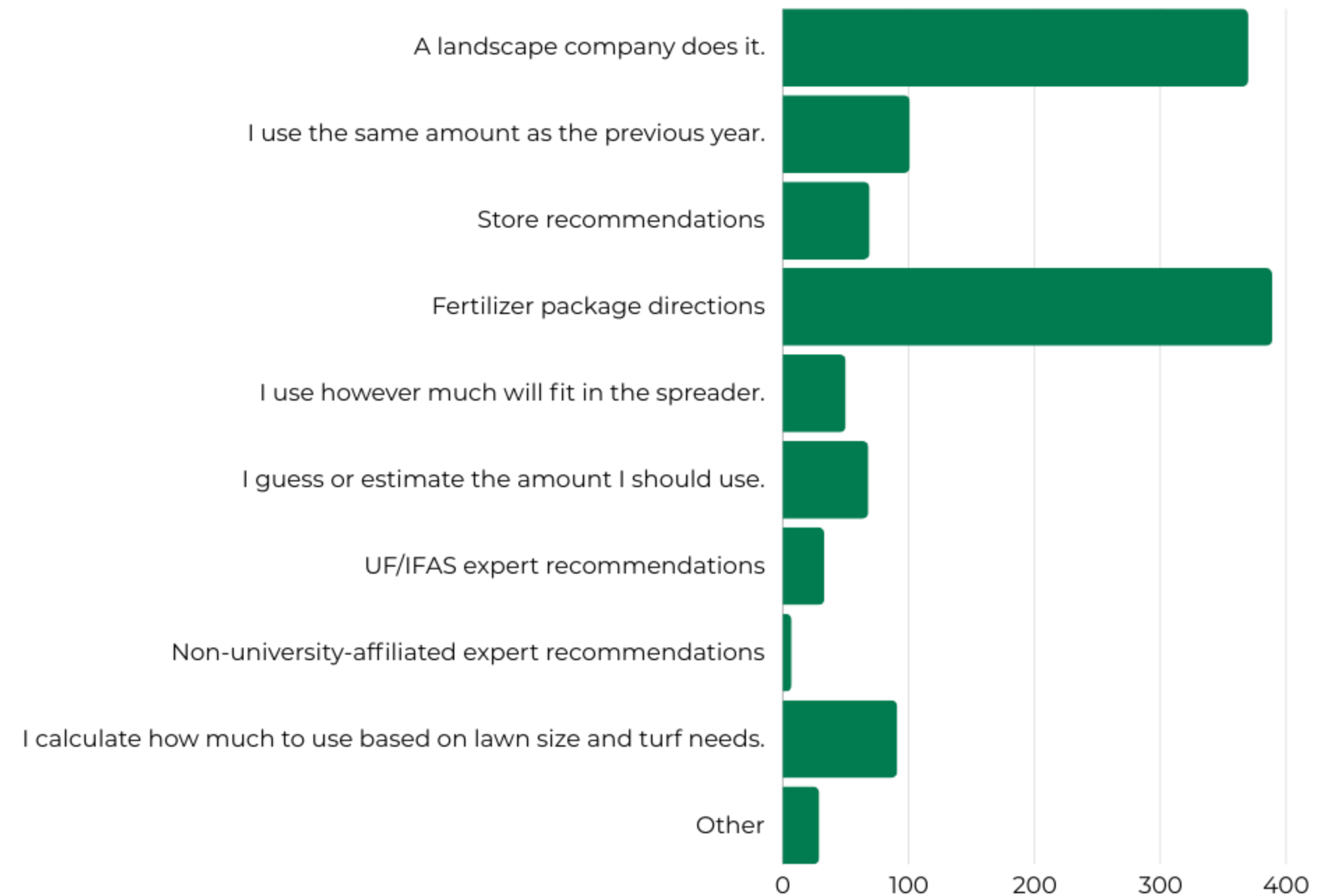


A large number of respondents were unsure of their lawn's fertilizer application schedule, possibly due to outsourcing labor for landscape services.

HOW MUCH FERTILIZER?

When determining how much fertilizer to apply to their lawns, Floridians rely on fertilizer package directions.

Those who do not fertilize themselves rely on landscaping companies to make fertilizer amount decisions.

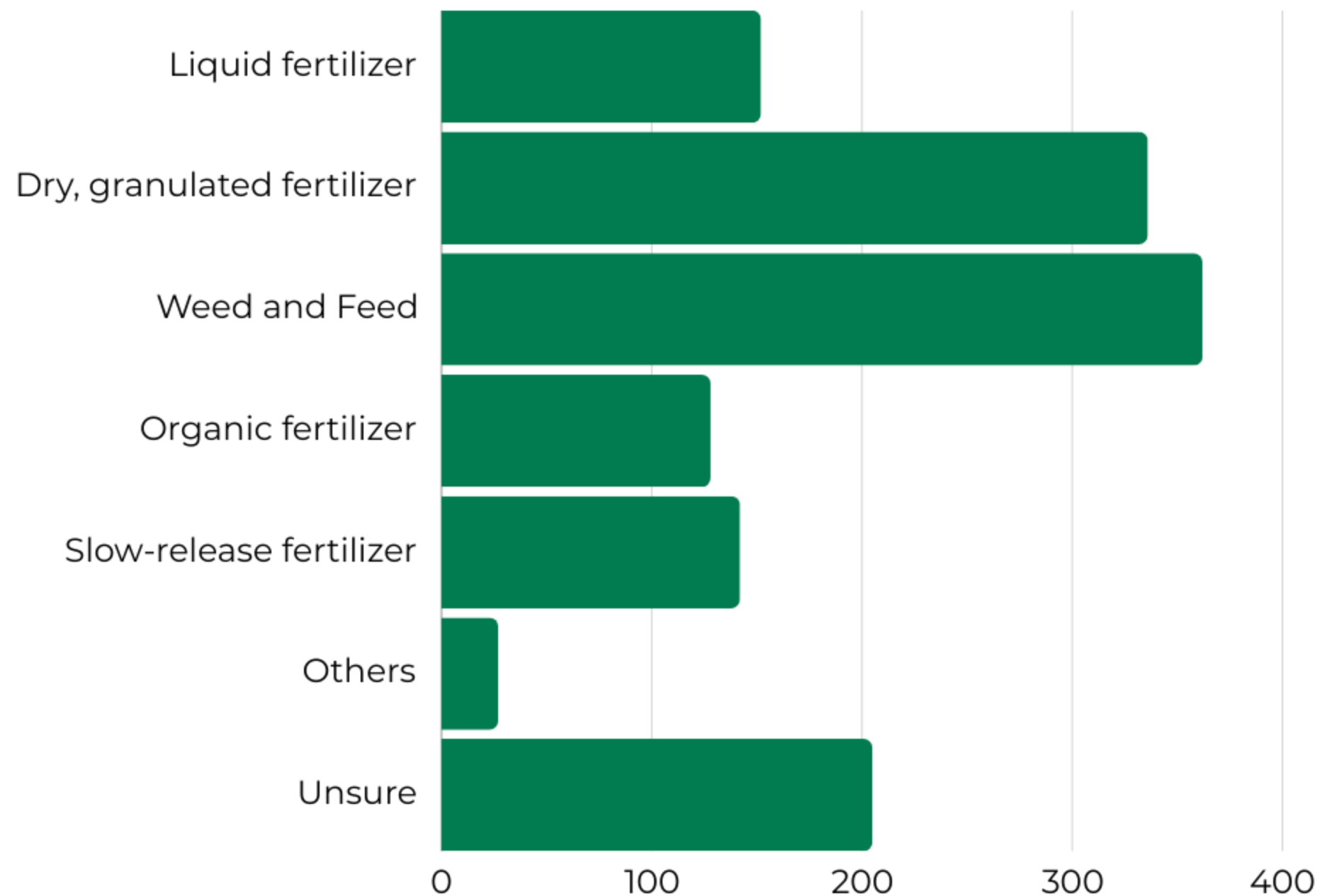


WHERE IS FERTILIZER PURCHASED?

Most Floridians source their fertilizer from home improvement stores.



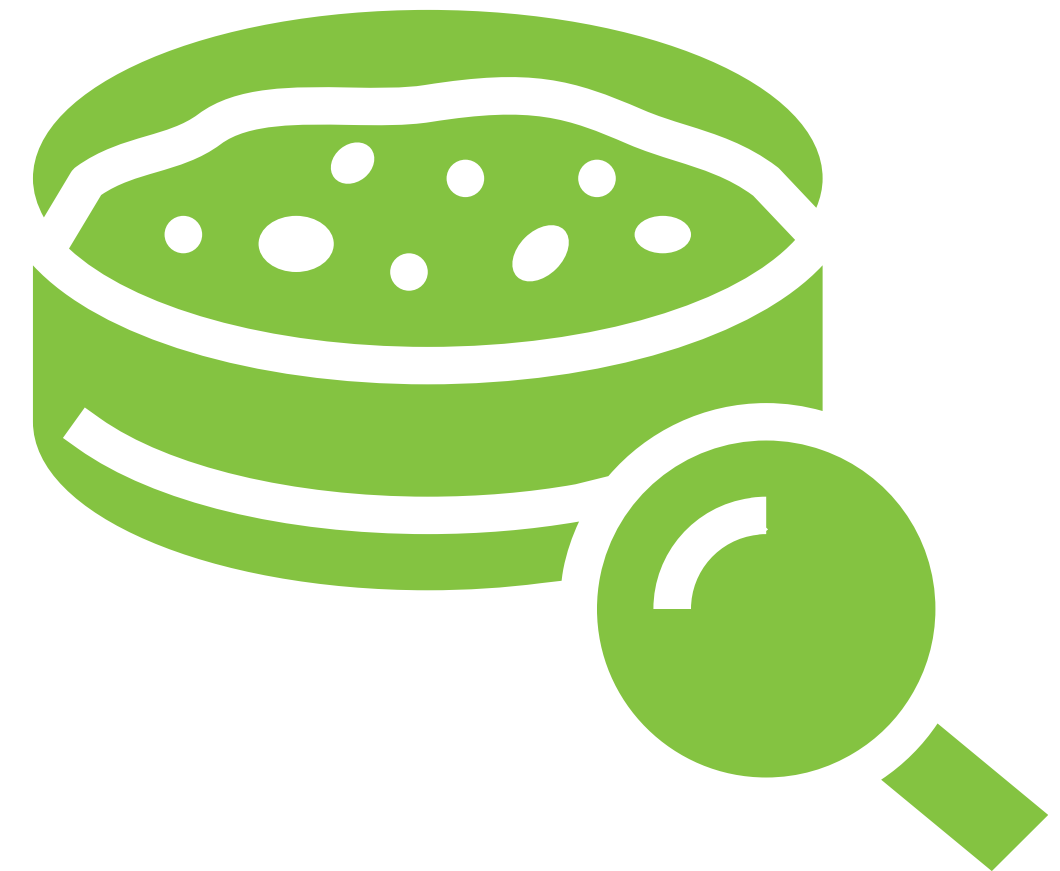
WHAT TYPES OF FERTILIZER?



The most popular type of fertilizer is Weed and Feed, with dry, granulated fertilizer coming in second place.

SOIL TESTING & FERTILIZER APPLICATION

- Most respondents had not tested their soil in the last 12 months (65%). Less than 12% of respondents apply fertilizers based on soil test results.
- When asked to disclose their future intention, 34% indicated they intend to test their soil to determine what amount of nutrients should be applied.



FUTURE FERTILIZER APPLICATION

IN THE FUTURE, I WILL:

READ THE FERTILIZER LABEL TO MAKE SURE I APPLY THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF FERTILIZER.



YES - 69.6%

PREVENT THE MISAPPLICATION OF FERTILIZER ON PAVED SURFACES.



YES - 67.3%

WATER-IN FERTILIZER, JUST AFTER ITS APPLICATION.



YES - 64.8%

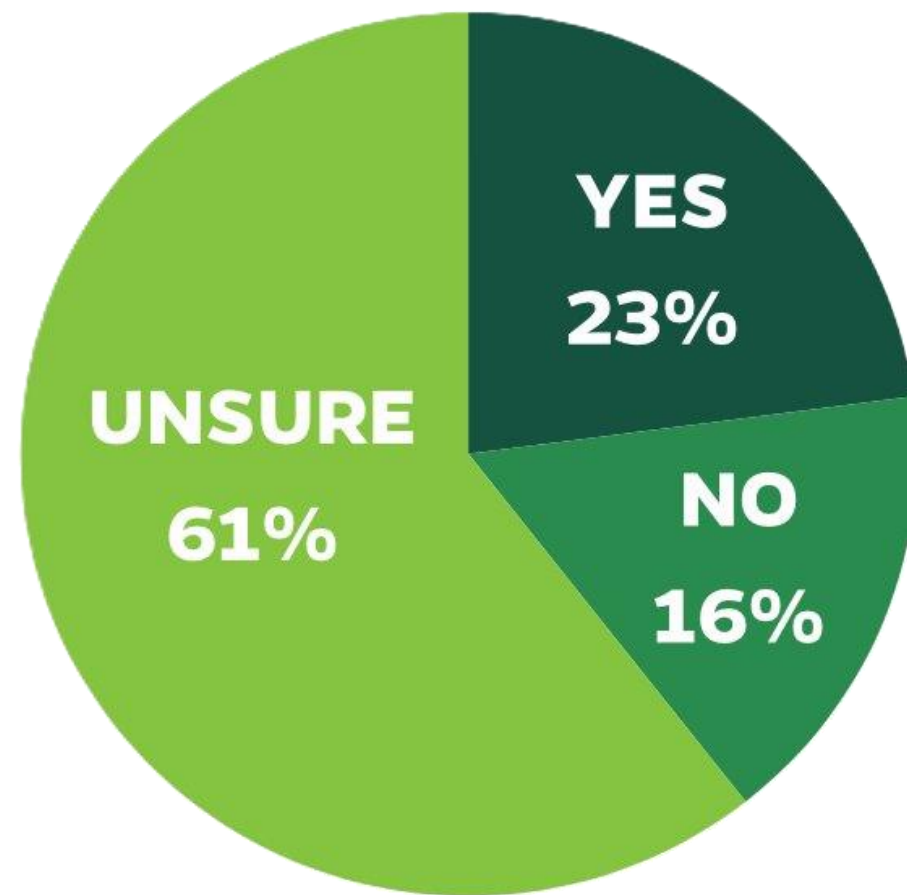
SELECT SLOW-RELEASE FERTILIZER PRODUCTS.



YES - 58.3%

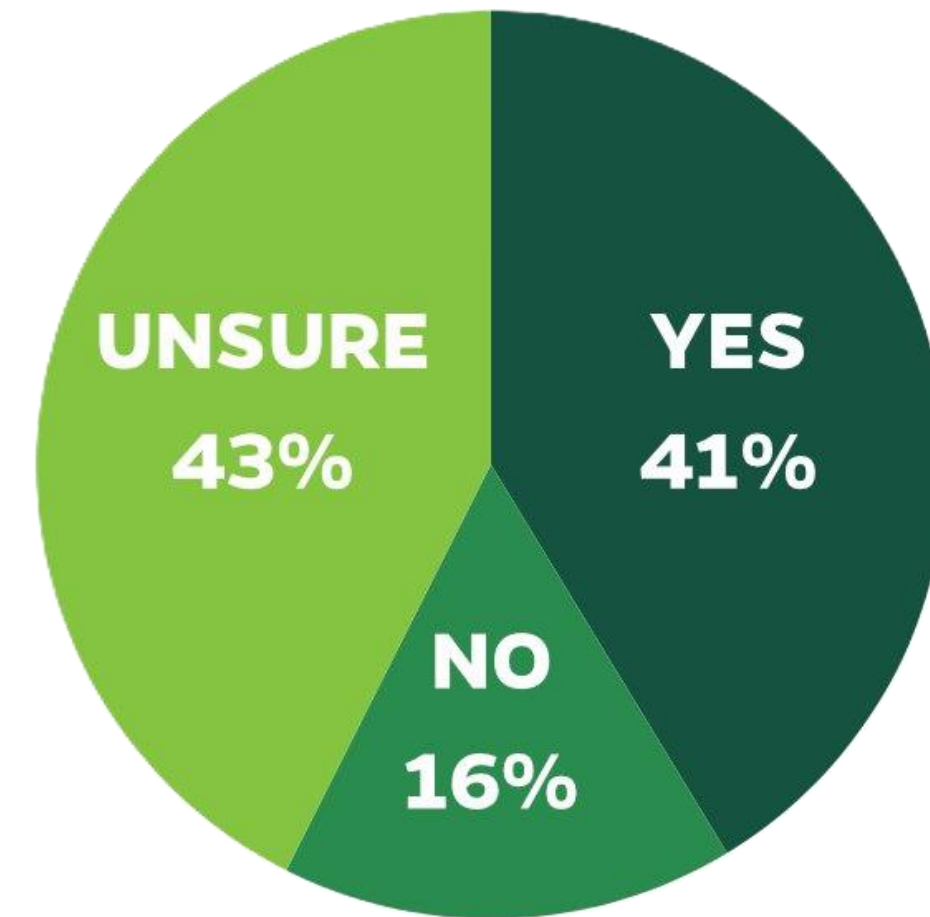
RESIDENTIAL FERTILIZER ORDINANCE AWARENESS AND ADHERENCE

AWARENESS OF RESIDENTIAL FERTILIZER ORDINANCE



Survey respondents were asked if they were aware of a fertilizer ordinance in their area; the majority (60.6%) were unsure. This knowledge gap is notable, as all respondents indicated that they fertilize their lawns.

SUPPORT OF FUTURE FERTILIZER ORDINANCE ADOPTION



Those who indicated they were not aware of a fertilizer ordinance or were unsure (716 respondents) were then asked whether they would support the future adoption of a residential fertilizer ordinance.

RESIDENTIAL FERTILIZER ORDINANCE AWARENESS AND ADHERENCE

Respondents were provided with several statements on fertilizer ordinances and were asked to indicate their level of agreement. Choices “agree” and “strongly agree” are categorized as “agree,” and choices “disagree” and “strongly disagree” are categorized as “disagree.”

FOLLOWING FERTILIZER ORDINANCES HELPS THE ENVIRONMENT

AGREE - 84.5%

A horizontal bar chart with a dark green bar representing 84.5% and a light green bar representing the remaining 15.5%.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND ADHERENCE TO FERTILIZER ORDINANCES WILL HELP THE ENVIRONMENT

AGREE - 83.5%

A horizontal bar chart with a dark green bar representing 83.5% and a light green bar representing the remaining 16.5%.

FERTILIZER ORDINANCES HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

AGREE - 82.1%

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I AM FAMILIAR WITH MY LOCAL FERTILIZER ORDINANCE

AGREE - 77.0%

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I ADHERE TO MY LOCAL FERTILIZER ORDINANCE

AGREE - 76.5%

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HOA INVOLVEMENT IN FERTILIZER APPLICATION

Out of 929 respondents, 447 reported being part of a homeowners association (48%). From this group, results indicate:

68%

report their HOA imposes penalties for the appearance of their landscape.

51%

report HOA manages homeowners' landscapes.

41%

report their HOA hires a landscaping company to apply fertilizer.

- When asked how often the HOA contracted company applied fertilizer, 31% were unsure. For those who were aware, 25% indicated quarterly and 19% indicated monthly.



FINDINGS

Researchers concluded the following findings based on survey data:

- Nearly half of all respondents fertilize their lawns themselves, with the remaining being split between hired help and homeowners association managed landscapes.
- Most respondents did not test their soil often and do not base their fertilizer application amount and frequency on soil test results.
- Respondents determined how much and how often they applied fertilizer by reading the fertilizer package labeling and from recommendations from landscaping professionals.
- Respondents typically fertilize their lawns in March, April, and September.



FINDINGS CONTINUED

- The most common type of fertilizer used was weed and feed, with dry, granulated fertilizer ranking second.
- Fertilizer use behaviors were primarily motivated by fertilizer package directions and a personal obligation to meet lawn needs, rather than motivation through peers, friends, and family.
- Over half of the respondents were unaware if their property existed within a residential fertilizer ordinance area. Of those who were unaware or knew they were not under an ordinance, respondents were evenly undecided on whether to support the adoption of a future residential fertilizer ordinance.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for research and practice are suggested:

- Extension professionals should develop and deliver fertilizer education programs, especially in counties and municipalities that have existing residential fertilizer ordinances.
- These Extension programs should emphasize the soil testing process and how test results impact fertilizer application amount and frequency.



CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate a lack of awareness and understanding surrounding fertilizer ordinances and practices. Subject matter experts, policy makers, and community leaders have an opportunity to utilize these findings to better inform the public on fertilizer policy and recommendations.

