ENVIRONMENT

Summer fertilizer bans start June 1 for several Tampa Bay area counties

The fertilizer bans run from Thursday, June 1, through Saturday, Sept. 30.

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Published: **3:05 PM EDT May 31, 2023**
Updated: **7:57 AM EDT June 1, 2023**

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Hey, Tampa Bay — it's time to pack up those bags of fertilizer.

Annual summer fertilizer bans go into effect for Pinellas, Hillsborough, Sarasota and Manatee counties on Thursday, June 1, and run through Saturday, Sept. 30.

Increased rainfall during the summer months can cause nutrients from lawn fertilizers to wash into nearby bodies of water, causing issues like algae blooms, red tide and fish kills.

So, in an effort to protect the local environment, county leaders ask everyone to refrain from using fertilizer on their lawns for the next few months.

The city of St. Pete provided some tips for keeping your lawn healthy while helping the local environmental initiative. They include:

- Treating your lawn with a slow-release fertilizer in the spring or fertilizer-free micronutrients in the summer

- Picking up debris or vegetation near storm drains to keep it from entering local waterways
- Following a no-now zone six feet away from any body of water
- Making sure your landscaper is certified through the county
- Replacing your plants with Florida-friendly natives

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Earlier this month, Florida lawmakers tucked a provision into the state budget that would prevent counties from putting new fertilizer bans in place. Counties with existing fertilizer bans — like Pinellas, Hillsborough, Sarasota and Manatee — will be allowed to continue enforcing them.

Some lawmakers have argued that the temporary pause on fertilizer bans will give researchers a window to study the effects of fertilizer on our waterways.

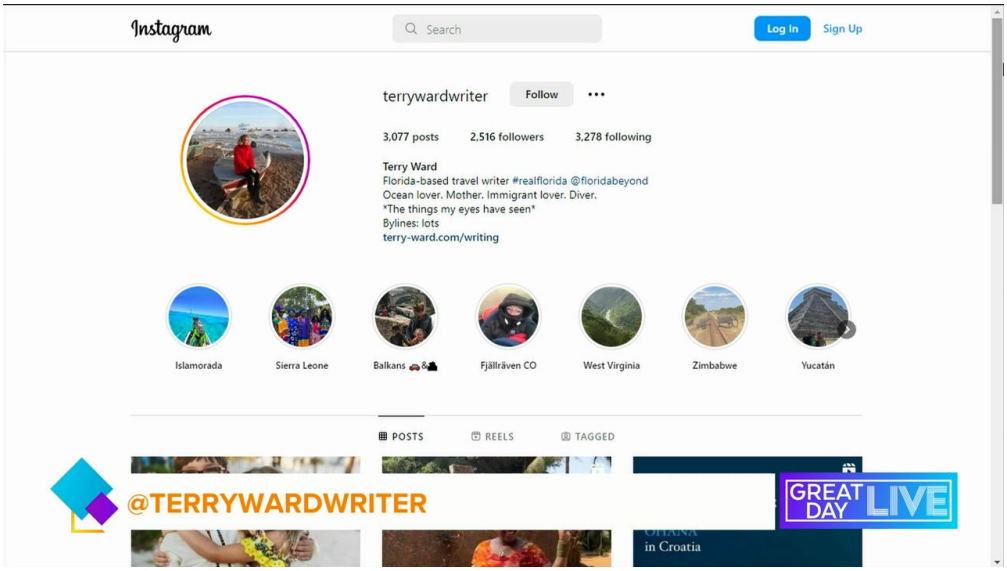
Environmentalists, on the other hand, called the provision another example of poor and uninformed decision-making by the legislature.

"Everything we do to add more nutrients in our waterway makes red tide worse, and this is one way to like continue to make red tides worse," Dave Tomasko, director of The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, said. "I think it's a mistake and we're not going to be better off. It's going to cost us money in the long term."

ENVIRONMENT

How The Florida Aquarium is working to conserve the Florida Reef Tract

The Florida Aquarium's Coral Conservation Program has worked for last several years to aid the coral crisis impacting the dying Florida Reef Tract.



Author: **Jordan Highsmith**
Published: **8:17 AM EDT May 1, 2023**
Updated: **8:17 AM EDT May 1, 2023**

TAMPA, Florida — If you care about the beautiful beaches along Florida's coast, then you can thank coral — you should actually be worried about coral as it impacts the Florida coastline.

The Florida Aquarium's Coral Conservation Program has worked for the last several years to aid the coral crisis impacting the dying Florida Reef Tract.

Through biologists' efforts, they're working to protect coral species that are at risk of extinction in the wild, increase coral reproduction rates, advance coral health and restore the Florida Reef Tract. Part of the coral crisis stems from people not knowing much about coral in the first place.

Fast facts

- Corals are animals
- Corals eat plankton and small fish
- Corals support 25 percent of ocean life
- Climate change is the biggest threat to corals

What's the problem?

According to Shedd Aquarium, warming waters from climate change are putting stress on coral populations, including those along the Florida Reef Tract.

Additional factors that impact the Florida Reef Tract include the dying off of key symbiotic species and Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease. It spans across most of the Florida Reef Tract and impacts 22 species of stony corals. While biologists are working to learn more about the disease, the cause is still unknown.

Related Articles

Florida Aquarium raises 560 corals relocated in the Keys

Florida hit with 'massive' coral reef bleaching

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Making a difference

The Florida Aquarium has made coral reproduction history many times. In 2019, biologists were able to induce spawning of several species of Atlantic coral in a lab setting. In 2020, they were first to reproduce and film larvae of the Ridged Cactus Coral and in 2022, they were able to reproduce elkhorn coral in the care of marine biologists for the first time in history.

In an effort to increase the coral population, Florida Aquarium has taken many steps. This includes laboratory-induced spawning, collection of wild gametes and collection of genetic bank gametes. One of their goals is to produce coral with a large amount of genetic diversity to increase its chances of survival.

Restoration

The Florida Aquarium works with many partners to help revive the Florida Reef Tract.

"In May 2021, a collaborative restoration initiative between scientists from The Florida Aquarium and the University of Miami (UM) Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, grooved brain corals rescued from a disease outbreak and maintained in human care have been bred for the first time with wild corals that survived the disease; raising hopes for restoring genetic diversity and increasing disease resistance on Florida's reefs," the aquarium wrote.

Other successes in The Florida Aquarium's line of work encompass successfully rearing long-spined sea urchins from gametes to juveniles and successfully raising the first batch of corals produced with cryopreserved sperm from different regions of the Caribbean.

The Florida Aquarium works with several partners to help conserve the Florida Reef Tract and other coral reefs in the Caribbean. The work of conserving the Earth's coral reefs is not something any one organization or one batch of scientists can take on alone. Among partners,

The Florida Aquarium works with MOTE Marine Laboratory, NOAA, SeaWorld TECO, the University of Florida, the University of Miami and more.