

The Final Assault on our Lake

Dave Van der Worp
Lakes Foundation President

So far invasive species have been a problem because they make our lakes less usable. Invasive weeds cover swimming areas, our sailboats get caught up in them, and they crowd out fish spawning areas. But that is mostly a nuisance. Now we are going to be facing an even greater threat. Blue-green algae may make our lake completely unusable at certain times. Blue-green algae can produce toxins that make it unsafe to be in the water. Our pets can be killed by these toxins and our kids sickened by them. Scared enough? Read on!

Blue-green algae is not even an algae. It just looks like one. It is really a cyanobacteria. It is not killed by common algaecides; in fact, algaecides may even make it more toxic. The only cure for blue-green algae is to starve it. Normally the nutrients (mainly nitrogen and phosphorus) that are found in our lake are used by fish and natural vegetation to thrive and grow. But when there are more nutrients than can be used by the normal consumers, the blue-green bacteria start to proliferate. They bloom!

How can we starve them? Reduce their food!

Have your septic system checked regularly. Make sure it is working properly, and pump it out when necessary.

Do not use any cleaning or washing product that contains phosphorus. Read the label!

Pick up after your pet. Their waste contains all the food that blue-green algae love.

Don't burn leaves. The ashes are high in nutrients that get into the lake by runoff. If you do burn leaves, remove the ashes to a place where they cannot get into the lake.

Same with campfires. Keep them at least 20 feet from the water and/or corral and remove the ashes before the nutrients can get into the lake

Don't feed the waterfowl. They can get enough food by themselves and feeding them only encourages more, and their poop is pure nitrogen and phosphorus.

Leave a strip of natural land between your lawn and the lake to slow down and settle runoff before it gets into the lake.

Don't use any fertilizers that use phosphorus and nitrogen. Read the label!

Find out what other sources of nutrients from surrounding areas are getting into the lake. Who, if any, in our immediate watershed is contributing to excess nutrients? This is being looked into by your lake association board members.