

## Fight Algae in Your Pond With Barley Straw



I ran this information in the Fall Issue of this newsletter, and I think it's important enough to run again. It's nearly spring, and the days are getting longer and warmer as we get nearer to another summer. **The algae in your pond will be back.** You will be looking for something to help make your pond look nice again. I have an environmentally safe alternative for you to try, "Barley Straw".

Here's how it works. The decomposition of the barley straw in the water produces and releases many compounds, one of which helps to control algae populations. The chemical compound does not eliminate existing algae cells but interferes with and prevents the growth of new algae cells.

How much to apply? The amount of straw to apply is based on pond surface area rather than volume. In a one-acre pond, the amount required would be about 107 pounds of straw, or 2 to 3 bales. In a pond with a history of algae problems, doubling that amount is recommended. In small ornamental ponds the recommendation is 0.025 pounds of straw be used for every square yard of pond surface area.

How and where do I put the straw? In small ornamental ponds, simply place the small amount required loosely in a mesh bag and place in the water. A weight of some sort should be added so the bag is floating near the pond bottom, under the water. In larger ponds, each bale should be broken up as much as possible so that nearly all decomposition will occur.

In a one-acre pond, this will result in 6-9 loosely filled separate mesh-type bags. These bags containing loose straw should be placed around the perimeter of the pond in water no deeper than 6 feet. You might also want to attach a floatation device under each bag of straw so that it doesn't sink to the bottom of the pond.

Most algae production occurs in shallow water so the bulk of the control compound needs to be located there. Attaching a rope to each bag is advisable in order

to retrieve the bags and replace the decomposed straw with fresh straw as needed.

When to apply the straw. Barley straw should be placed in the pond in April for best results. As the pond water warms in May, filamentous algae growth and reproduction along the bottom can be explosive! Treatment after this period may not yield the desired control results. If you have had an ongoing problem with algae, you can give it a treatment of the barley straw in the fall also, then it can work over winter.

Advantages: The chemical produced is a naturally occurring product that you will find occurring in any decomposing plant material in water, and will not harm fish, waterfowl, or humans. There have been observations of increased invertebrate populations and improvement of gill development in fish from ponds where barley straw is applied.

Disadvantages: Use of barley straw would result in very clear water which will allow more sunlight to reach submerged plants, resulting in lush growth. Adding additional organic material to ponds carries the risk of a fish kill, and decaying vegetation, whether it be barley straw or aquatic plants, requires large amounts of oxygen. Keeping the water moving, as in a spring fed pond is important in this process. While the risk may be small, it could pose a problem for some ponds. In these situations, the pond owner may wish to consider installing an aerator to reduce the risk of fish kill from lack of oxygen.

If you think barley straw is something you would like to use to try and clear up the algae problem in your pond, call our office at 518-828-4386 x3. (We have some straw on hand and we can help get more for you.) - by D. Cady

