



Lagoons and the Green Slimies

Spring is right around the corner and for everyone that lives on or near a pond, lake, or lagoon, spring normally means the green slimies will soon arrive. Algae, whether you call it green slimies, moss, or 'that icky green stuff', typically occurs in most freshwater waterways at some point during the year. Many varieties exist, but for general discussion we'll characterize the algae we see in our area as light to dark green floating mats that may or may not have filaments extending down to the pond bottom.

Why can't we just make it go away?! Algae prosper under conditions similar to your lawn or seasonal garden. Its primary substrate is obviously water (we have plenty of this), it likes nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous (our lawns and fairways provide plenty of this), it loves sunshine (thank goodness we have plenty of this), and freshwater algae will grow in a variety of water temperatures. Needless to say we have optimal growing conditions for algae.

Is all algae 'bad'? Not necessarily. Generally speaking microscopic or planktonic algae can be 'good' if managed correctly. This is the algae that turns our water a light green and is technically called an algae bloom. If your pond water suddenly turns green, fear not, an algae bloom has occurred. When present in moderate amounts, an algae bloom can help shade out the green slimies and other submersed aquatic plants. Fish also benefit from moderate algae blooms as the algae is the base of the aquatic food chain, fostering increased abundance of aquatic organisms for fish to eat. Algae blooms are typically associated with nutrient-rich waters (lots of phosphorous) and can be caused by runoff from fertile soils or by fertilizing the water directly with aquatic fertilizer. Dense algae blooms however can cause water quality problems (e.g. fish kills) if not managed correctly.

So why can't we just manage for the 'good' algae and do away with the green slimies? There are a myriad of factors to consider, all of which are dynamic- water quality, water clarity, water temperature, fertility...the list goes on. Managing for 'good' algae and against 'bad' algae is a tenuous balancing act that requires knowledge of water quality dynamics, biological processes, the algae species present, and available management tools.