

“Fertilizers – It’s Feeding Time!”

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by Annie Plowman

Spring is coming and if you’re reading this, chances are you want your garden to look nice and may be wondering what type of fertilizers to use for new and established plantings. Understanding some of the basics will help you make some sense of your choices. It’s feeding time!

When shopping for fertilizers you will want to make note of the three numbers on the box. These numbers correspond to the N-P-K of the fertilizer or the macronutrients Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium. (I think the “K” is there to confuse us. lol) These numbers will relate to what function the fertilizer will serve.

The first number will impact growth and greening; the second number will relate to bloom, roots and fruit production; and the third will affect the root development and disease resistance. Starter fertilizers, and fertilizers for blooming and vegetables will have high second numbers. If you choose a fertilizer with a high first number, you may have a lot of growth and greening but no bloom. If you need a little greening but don’t want to boost the nitrogen, you can always use some iron.

When choosing fertilizers you also have an additional choice to make; organic or synthetic. The numbers on organic fertilizers are much lower but that does not make them less effective. In fact there are so many advantages. They can give you amazing results, improve your soil and help you not to make a detrimental impact on the environment. Overuse of synthetic fertilizers can have a detrimental affect on the environment, your garden and your soil. It can also burn the plants or lawn when not properly used or used to excess. There are some cases where the synthetic fertilizer may be the better choice for you (and sometimes me) but, it should always be used in accordance with the label.

Hydrangeas, Camellias, Azaleas, Gardenias and some other plants are called acid lovers. They are going to prefer a slightly more acidic soil or a soil that is lower in Ph. They will also prefer an acid fertilizer. You can use a separate product for these plants or add cottonseed meal and/or peat moss and your used coffee grounds to help bump up the acid.

Some plants are considered heavy feeders that should be fertilized fairly often. Some of these are Citrus, Roses, Palm trees and some tropicals. Your nursery professional should be able to help you to identify which fertilizer choice is right for you. You won’t need to fertilize at all while a plant is dormant. When it’s dormant, it’s sleeping and not feeding.

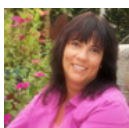
My favorite fertilizer is an organic fertilizer that contains beneficial microbes to kick start the circle-of-life in the soil and it also contains mycorrhizae. The mycorrhizae are fungi that benefit the soil structure and dramatically improve the root system and drought tolerance of the plant. Love it! I use organic fertilizer with all my new and existing plants and have much greater success because of it. It’s affordable and good for the environment. Plus Plus.

Another one of my favorites is seaweed extract. This is a great natural boost of micronutrients for plants. Sometimes after the first bloom and especially late in summer, my plants can look tired. I give them a quick boost by doing a foliar spray using a garden-hose-sprayer for application of seaweed extract and then mixing it with water and pouring around the base of my plants. I usually see results within a week.

These are just some basic basics but it should help to make some sense of what can be a confusing subject. I’ve compiled a few links that provide more information for those of you that are curious about the topic and want more reading.

Happy Planting!

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<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fertilizer>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mycorrhiza>



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