



FERTILIZING: Some Information

Plants consistently require three major nutrients (macronutrients): nitrogen (**N**), phosphorus (**P**), and potassium (**K**). These are represented by the three numbers that are on all fertilizer indicating their percentage by weight in that container.

- **Nitrogen** fuels leaf and stem growth and is the nutrient that depletes fastest (especially in lawns). It also helps plants and lawns stay green.
- **Phosphorus** stimulates flowering and fruiting and promotes strong rooting. It is prominent in fertilizers used in Fall for more abundant Spring flowers.
- **Potassium** promotes flowering and fruiting, disease and stress resistance, and overall plant sturdiness.

Occasionally, plants are deficient in secondary and micronutrients. Our staff can diagnose such deficiencies – e.g., in iron – and recommend remedies.

Fertilizers are derived from **chemical and** from **natural (“organic”) sources**. We generally prefer the organics as they act more naturally and slowly: they build up the soil as they decay, and there is less chance of burning roots. Synthetic or natural, more is *not* better. There are many good reasons not to overuse fertilizers. And just because a plant looks sick doesn’t mean it needs fertilizer; in fact, fertilizing a stressed plant could do more harm than good. Follow the recommendations on the product and/or from our staff.

Watering plants before fertilizing enhances effectiveness and is necessary for water-soluble fertilizers. When planting trees, shrubs and perennials, use an **organic starter fertilizer** with mycorrhizae and humic acid, like E.B.Stone’s *Sure Start*, as these promote strong rooting right off.

There is **no single schedule for fertilizing** as some plants need almost no fertilizing once established while others – like citrus and lawns – are “heavy feeders.” Also, container plants have higher needs than those in the ground. For flowering plants, like roses, it’s appropriate to fertilize around the three summer holidays: Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day. As a rule, don’t use nitrogen between October and February (except for turf) as the new growth it pushes is more susceptible to frost.

A liquid worm-compost ‘tea’ that we brew up freshly in our kitchen cart, **SoilSoup**, is a perfect and inexpensive accompaniment to organic fertilizers. Its beneficial microorganisms work with naturally-occurring and added soil nutrients, enhancing fertilizer effectiveness and boosting soil and plant robustness overall.