

Fertilizer Basics



Like all living things, plants need nutrients to grow and thrive. Plants get most of their nutrients from the air, soil and water; but sometimes they may need some extra help from you.

Fertilizer Labels

5-3-3

“Up”-“Down”-“All Around”

All fertilizers are marked with three numbers. These numbers, sometimes called the analysis or NPK numbers, tell you the amount of primary nutrients contained in the fertilizer. The first number stands for Nitrogen (N), the second for Phosphate (P) and the last for potash or potassium (K). A good way to remember what these numbers mean is “Up, Down and All Around.” Nitrogen works to promote blooming and leaf growth (“Up”), phosphorus promotes strong root growth (“Down”) and potassium increases hardiness and disease resistance (“All Around”). Keep in mind that bigger numbers don’t mean better fertilizers. Often, high analysis plant foods are wasted because the plant can’t utilize all the nutrients right away. Look for fertilizers with “Slow Release” nitrogen to avoid this. Also, check for a diverse number of ingredients and rates of release.

Organic vs. Synthetic

Any fertilizer can be completely safe and effective if used correctly in accordance with the directions on the package. Plants can’t tell the difference between chemical and organic materials, so you should pick the fertilizer that best suits your needs and plans.

Organic – made from plant material or animal byproducts		Synthetic – made from inorganic or man-made materials	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Longer lasting, Slow release. Organic fertilizers can provide feeding for several months. • Very safe to use. Organic fertilizers pose little threat to kids, pets and won’t leach into the soil • Organic fertilizers won’t burn plants during a drought or over application 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as balanced as organic fertilizers • Often more expensive than their chemical counterparts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically produce faster results than organics. • Very balanced and easy to use • Often less expensive than organics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can burn or damage plants if applied incorrectly • Effects can sometimes be short lived • Require a little extra care to use safely.

Basic Plant Feeding Chart

Type of Plant	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov
Acid Loving									
Shade/ Fruit Trees									
Annuals / Perennials									
Roses									
Bulbs									
Tomatoes									
Vegetables									
Lawns									

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