

NEWSPAPER RELEASE

Manatee County Extension Service
1303 17th Street West
Palmetto, FL 34221
Telephone: 941-722-4524
Fax: 941-721-6608

For more information, contact:
Jane Morse, Extension Agent
E-mail: jvmorse@mail.ifas.ufl.edu

Vitamins for the landscape

by Jane Morse, University of Florida/IFAS Extension Agent, Manatee County

Plants produce their own food, but they do need certain nutrients to grow properly. We usually supply these nutrients by applying store-bought fertilizer. Applying mulch or compost, especially from our own yards, will also produce a great slow-release fertilizer and also saves energy.

Most established plants grow well when fertilized 2 or 3 times a year. For our area fertilize once mid-February to mid-March, then again mid-September to mid-October and sometime during the summer. Use a complete fertilizer such as 15-5-15. Fertilizers where 30-50% of the nitrogen is water insoluble or slow-release are best. These provide nitrogen to the plants over a long period of time. Too much nitrogen released at once promotes excessive growth which leads to increased problems and costs. Excess nitrogen can also be carried into our waterways and cause pollution. If you live on the waterfront, keep fertilizer applications at least 15 feet away from the water.

Some plants (ixora, gardenia, azalea) require an acidic soil pH. If these plants are placed in an alkaline soil they will have nutrient deficiencies. These deficiencies can be treated using a micronutrient foliar spray (found in garden centers), however, this will last only a short time. It is best to choose plants that are suited to the soil type and other site conditions such as sun/shade, wet/dry, or hot/cold. Florida-native plants, if chosen and planted correctly, are well adapted to our soil and climate and rarely need extra water or fertilizer. Florida-native plants also provide much better wildlife habitat for birds, butterflies and other important critters.

Palms and cycads (King and Queen Sago) need special care. These two types of plants tend to have potassium, magnesium and manganese deficiencies. Look for a "palm special" fertilizer that has 10-20% nitrogen, 5% phosphorus pentoxide, 10-20% potassium oxide, 1-3% magnesium and 0.5% manganese and iron. Try to buy palm fertilizer that has the nitrogen, potassium and magnesium in slow-release forms. If you have palms in your landscape, this type of "palm special" fertilizer should be used on the entire landscape including the grass.

When applying fertilizer, apply a maximum of one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. If you have a bag of 15-5-10 fertilizer, divide the first number into 100. The first

number is the percent of nitrogen in the bag. Example: $100 \div 15 = 6.6$ -- This means that you need to apply 6.6 pounds of this 15-5-10 fertilizer over 1000 square feet to supply a pound of nitrogen.

When fertilizing trees and shrubs be sure to broadcast the fertilizer evenly under the canopy and out 1½ to 2 times past the canopy diameter. Tree and shrub roots spread out 2 to 3 times past the drip line of the canopy. Since most feeder roots on trees and shrubs are shallow, there is no need to inject or place fertilizer deep in the soil. Concentrating fertilizer in a small area (fertilizer stakes) can burn roots that come in contact with the fertilizer. Also, when fertilizer is concentrated in a limited area only a few roots will find it. It is much better to evenly broadcast fertilizer over a wide area.

For more information about gardening, soil testing, fertilizing and more call the Extension Service at 722-4524 Monday thru Friday, 9AM - 4PM, and ask to speak to a Master Gardener.

#####

~~~~~  
Jane Morse  
Environmental Extension Agent,  
Manatee County

1303 17th Street West  
Palmetto, FL 34221  
Phone: 941-722-4524  
Fax: 941-721-6608