

# Feed The Flora.

## Fall Is A Great Time To Fertilize.

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As we begin to leave the sweltering Summer, and go into the cooler Fall months, many of us see that our gardens are fading fast and returning to the earth (herbaceous), to go dormant and rest-up for the coming Winter period of complete dormancy, in anticipation of the following Spring re-birth. As nutrients are trans-located before "leaf drop," down the stems of plants and trunks of trees, for storage in the rootball over the Winter months, it's important to think about fertilizing. Lawns, too.

Taking the time to fertilize in the Fall will strengthen your plants' and lawn's roots, giving them a strong base on which to thrive next spring. Yes, in the Fall.

Since the above-ground growth is slowing noticeably, it's not readily-apparent that much activity is taking place, underground, in the root mass. It will continue to take up nutrients from the soil until soil temps drop below 40°F, and all activity ceases. At just above 40°F, the physiological and biochemical changes in plants become stimulated into several actions. They begin producing higher concentrations of dissolved sugars, amino acids and other soluble organic molecules. Then, the cells create concentrations of chemically-bound water molecules. This aids the elasticity of the protoplasm, which in turn makes a plant resilient during freezing. (Sounds like Biology 101, doesn't it?)

Plant needs are very different now, than during the Spring and Summer months. In those warmer months, your plants are busy leafing-out and blooming. In the Fall slowdown, prior to Winter dormancy, with all those nutrients going back down to the roots, plants don't want food that stimulates the upper growth. This time of year their needs require fertilizers low in nitrogen (N) because nitrogen stimulates above-ground, vegetative growth.

What's needed now, is a fertilizer rich in phosphate (as  $P_2O_5$ ) and potash (as  $K_2O$ ). We recommend Espoma's Holly-Tone® Fertilizer. Look on the bag for the formula of those three numbers, such as 4-6-4. These indicate the ratio of nitrogen, phosphate and potash (sometimes called potassium) in the mix and are referred to as NPK. (Sounds like Chemistry 101, doesn't it?)

The first number represents nitrogen, which promotes lawn blade and foliage growth; the second number stands for phosphorus, which helps root growth; and the third is for potassium, which promotes cell function and absorption of trace elements.

All trees and shrubs need fertilizer, because most of them are installed in mulch beds, which uses up all available nitrogen, as it decomposes. Additionally, each fall most of us rake leaves off these beds, depriving plants of the nutrients that decomposing leaves would traditionally release more nutrients.

To compensate for this nutrient loss, simply apply 1-3 lbs of slow-release nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of bed and scratch it into the mulch, lightly. (To figure out the exact amount of fertilizer you'll need, calculate the square footage of your beds.) I like to fertilize trees and shrubs, in late September/ early October, to promote good root growth. These nutrients will be in the soil, locked-up in the plants' roots, when Spring arrives, and those plants start to grow again. If you have a tree or shrub that does not flower well, a dose of triple-super-phosphate (0-44-0) will help promote flower growth.

Fall is also the time to plant Spring-flowering bulbs. Once again, use triple-super-phosphate (0-44-0) to promote root growth, insuring strong flowering in the Spring. Others recommend using bone meal when planting bulbs, but it can attract rodents who'll eat both the bone meal and the bulbs. And there go your Spring flowers, for a little critter's dinner!

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