

Time to Fertilize the Lawn

Distribute 09-21-2017

It is time to fertilize the lawn. Fertilization in the fall can green up the lawn but it does not stimulate much grass growth. The grass growth response to fertilizer changes in the fall and the main beneficial action is internal. The nutrients are organized within the plant to provide increased cold resistance and to contribute to a fast green-up in the spring. If you are one of those gardeners that gets impatient for the lawn to turn green in the spring and tries to accomplish early green-up by fertilizing in February or March, you will have more success by investing in this fall fertilization.

Seek out a lawn fertilizer for the fall fertilization that has a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphate to potash, 18-6-12 fertilizer is one such product. It also should be a fast release source of nutrients because the grass has a limited period to utilize the nutrients before the weather could become cold and interfere with uptake capability. Recognize that the fertilizer is designed for efficient use in the fall if it is labeled as a "winterizer" formula.

Apply the "winterizer" fertilizer to achieve the same addition of nitrogen as you do in the spring (May 1), one pound of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn. To apply 1lb of nitrogen per 1000 sq.ft. of lawn you will be applying a little more than 5 lbs of the fertilizer since the material is 18 per cent nitrogen. That equates to about 10 cups of fertilizer because each cup weighs about one half pound.

Is my math lesson driving you crazy? If so, it is easiest just to follow the application rate recommended on the fertilizer bag for your particular fertilizer applicator. One pound of nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn is usually the lowest rate on your applicator.

If you have a small lawn you will not use the whole bag of "winterizer" fertilizer on the grass, which is okay because it can be used to fertilize the plants in your fall vegetable and cool weather flower gardens. Mix the same 10 cups of fertilizer into the gardens prior to planting and then sidedress the plants every 3 weeks with about one half cup of fertilizer through the winter growing season.

It is especially important that the fall tomatoes, broccoli, onions, and greens be well fertilized for the whole season.

Do not use "winterizer" fertilizer for your container grown vegetables and flowers. Use Osmocote or another product specially designed for containers for the initial fertilization at planting and then consider using one of the water soluble fertilizers like Miracid, HastaGro, Peters, or Schulz every 2 or 3 weeks in your watering can. For annual plants in containers it is not unreasonable to apply a dilute form of the soluble fertilizer every time you water.

If you have fruit trees you will want to give them some special consideration this fall. It is ideal if the deciduous fruit trees can retain their leaves until November 1. That means you need to keep them watered until that time. On or about November 1 we usually apply a copper hydroxide product such as Kocide for preventative treatment of bacterial diseases on peaches, apples and plums. The copper treatment will contribute to a leaf drop.

If you are lucky your backyard citrus trees are loaded with fruit. It is not recommended to fertilize them with nitrogen at this time of the year. It will encourage a flush of growth before the cold weather threatens them and the fruit is harvested. You can, however, apply an iron chelate product such as Carl Pool or Fertilome Chelated Iron if the foliage is yellow from iron shortage. Follow label instructions.