

## Fertilizing in the Landscape in North Central Florida

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Many trees and landscape plants demand little or no fertilizer once they are established and mature. In fact, fertilizers can be hazardous to the health of your yard and the environment when they are misused.

When over-applied, fertilizers aggravate insects and disease problems and force excessive growth which must be mowed or pruned. Excess fertilizers can run off yards into waterways or leach into aquifers, polluting drinking water.

### Fertilizer Facts:

#### 1. Fertilizer is not plant food.

Food to a plant is the sugars it makes through photosynthesis. Fertilizer nutrients are used in this process, but a lawn or plant growing poorly in too much shade will not grow better if fertilized.

#### 2. The Truth about "100% Organic."

The "100% Organic" claim often refers only to the nitrogen in the bag, furthermore, the nitrogen can be derived from natural products such as manure

- Fertilize only as needed to maintain the health of lawns and landscape plants. If plants show signs of stress, such as yellow leaves or stunted growth, identify the problem before applying fertilizer. Do not exceed the rate of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per application.

or it can be from synthetic chemicals such as urea. Read the label to determine where the "organic" nitrogen is coming from.

#### 3. Buy nutrients, not fertilizer.

Many fertilizers contain a number of plant nutrients even though only one or two may be needed. What plant response do you want – greener growth? More flowers or fruits?

### Slow-release Fertilizers

When fertilizer nutrients are in slow release" forms, they are available to plants over a longer period of time and less nutrients are wasted or lost as pollutants. Look for these terms on the product or fertilizer tag:

Timed-release, slow-release; insoluble or controlled-release.

Water insoluble nitrogen, activated sludge, sulfur-coated urea (SCU), IBDU, ureaform (UF), nitroform, or polymer-, plastic-, or resin-coated urea.

- Use slow-release fertilizers. Buy fertilizers that contain 30% or more of the nitrogen in slow-release forms.
- Use iron (ferrous sulfate or chelated iron) instead of nitrogen to make your lawn green during the summer.

**Soil tests** serve as a valuable guide for fertilizing. Such tests indicate the amounts of available phosphorus, potassium, calcium and magnesium in a soil. The pH (acidity or alkalinity) of a soil is also determined. If your pH is too high or too low it will affect how your plants use the fertilizer

**Timing:** Fertilize during the growing season. Usually the first fertilization is done in March after the danger of a freeze. The last month to fertilize in October.

Know your plants to understand their nutrient requirements