

FACT SHEET: Fertilizer Facts: Words to Grow By

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A diseased or pest-ridden plant may not grow any better with fertilizer. A plant that isn't receiving the right amount of light or is planted in soil with too low or high of a pH level may not grow better with fertilizer. By placing the right plant in the right place, you are giving that plant a good fighting chance for survival. pH testing is performed at the Hillsborough County Extension office for \$2.00 per sample. For more information on soil testing, call 744-5519.

All fertilizers are not created equal. Fertilizers you purchase should be formulated for the plants you intend to fertilize. This means buying turf fertilizers for turfgrass, palm fertilizers for palm trees, and flower fertilizers for ...you guessed it...flowers! Photosynthesis provides sugar (food) for plants. Nutrients in fertilizers do too. As with pretty much everything else in life, read the label...then re-read the label, and apply according to the instructions. The same applies to using a fertilizer spreader. Read the directions on the fertilizer bag. If it doesn't have a spreader setting list, contact the fertilizer manufacturer or select a product that has a list of spreader settings. Refer to the UF article, *How to Calibrate Your Fertilizer Spreader* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH024>

If you don't apply fertilizer properly, you can cause more damage than benefit. For *Fertilizer Recommendations for Landscape Plants*, go to <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/EP114>

Slow-release, timed-released or controlled-release fertilizers allow the nutrients to be available for plant intake for a longer period of time. These types of fertilizers are less likely to leach beyond the root zone during rain or irrigation cycles, which make them more cost effective than water-soluble fertilizer products. Slow-release fertilizers continue to perform for as much as 3-4 months, depending on temperature and humidity.

Look for these terms on slow-release fertilizer product labels: water-soluble nitrogen, biosolids, activated sludge, sulfur-coated urea (SCU), isobutylidene diurea (IBDU), ureaform (UF) nitroform, polymer-, plastic- or resin-coated urea. Also look for: 15-0-15 or 15-2-16, which indicates the contents are not more than 2% phosphorus (the middle number). We don't really need phosphorus in our fertilizer because we already have a significant amount in the soil. The three numbers on the fertilizer bag are for Nitrogen (N), Phosphorus (P) and Potassium (K). See the UF article, *The Florida Fertilizer Label* at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/SS170> for more information.

During our rain-filled hurricane months, avoid the use of water-soluble/quick-release nitrogen, such as ammonium nitrate, urea ammonium phosphate or potassium chloride. Instead, apply iron to your turfgrass in the summer, which will "green-up" your lawn without making it grow even faster.

Improper fertilizer applications can run off lawn and landscape beds, polluting our waterways and damaging plants, animals and our environment. Using Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ principles helps protect our surface and ground waters. Using UF/IFAS recommended fertilizer application rates and timing will help prevent non-point source pollution (water pollution that's associated with everyday human activities and driven by rainfall, runoff, and leaching) from urban landscapes. Combining low impact design principles (rain barrels, cisterns, swales, berms, and pervious surfaces), these correct cultural practices can reduce the flow of stormwater which can carry fertilizer, trash, pet waste, plant clippings, and loose soil into storm drains and water bodies.

For assistance with horticultural questions, call the Hillsborough County Extension Service, 5339 County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584 or call: 813-744-5519. More gardening information is available at <http://hillsborough.extension.ufl.edu> and <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.