

# Plant Fertilizing Calendar

by Walter Reeves, The Georgia Gardener (tm)

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You gotta eat, right? Plants do too! They don't enjoy fried chicken or ice cream like we do... but they need nutrients just the same. Unlike us, though, plants don't need three meals a day. Their food must be applied when they can use it. Otherwise, your money is wasted and good plant food becomes bad water pollution.

We've put together simple calendars to help you decide just when your fescue or forsythia or phlox needs to be fed.

The calendars illustrate ideal schedules of fertilizing... but they are not inflexible. For instance, even though the fescue fertilizing schedule denotes March and October as ideal months, you might still be able to fertilize successfully in February, April, September and November.

In general, the best time to fertilize a plant is when it is actively growing. You'll see that the Lawn Fertilization chart advises feeding bermudagrass when it is vigorously growing in summer, not when it is dormant in winter. The Flower Fertilization chart recommends feeding annuals and perennials in spring, as they put on new growth, and again in summer, as they continue to grow bigger, but not in fall as they decline.

The calendars are appropriate for Atlanta. If you live in other parts of the state, your schedule may need adjusting a few weeks earlier or later depending on your weather.

## FERTILIZER BASICS

Every plant need nutrients. The major nutrients that plants need are Nitrogen (N), Phosphate (P) and Potash (K). Fertilizer containers always note the percentage of N, P and K they hold. For instance, a bag of 10-10-10 contains ten percent of each ingredient. A container of 12-3-6 has twelve percent Nitrogen, three percent Phosphate and six percent Potash.

The relative percentages of each nutrient tell you what to expect from the fertilizer.

A "High Nitrogen" fertilizer stimulates growth of foliage. Ratios such as 29-6-4 are typical of lawn fertilizers, where vigorous green growth is desired.

A "High Phosphate" fertilizer assists in root formation, energy storage and flower formation (assuming your soil is deficient in Phosphorus to begin with). "Root Stimulator" fertilizers, like 5-20-10, typically have a high percentage of Phosphate.

A "High Potassium" fertilizer emphasizes the over-all good health of a plant. Potassium contributes to strong cell walls and resistance to drought and cold. "Winterizer" fertilizers usually are high in soluble Potassium.

## **SOIL TESTING**

There is no need to add nutrients to your soil if they are already present. The best way to determine how much fertilizer you need is by having your soil tested by the University of Georgia Soils Lab through your local Extension service office (404-897-6261). For a small fee you'll learn what nutrients you have and which ones need to be added, and in what amounts.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO SYNTHETIC FERTILIZER**

Most common fertilizers are manufactured from synthetic components such as natural gas, phosphoric acid and muriate of potash. If you'd rather use plant food from natural sources, there are plenty of options.

Milorganite, Fertrell, Espoma and Glorious Gardens are common brand names of organic plant food. Nutrients in these products come from animal waste or plant by-products. Cottonseed meal, blood meal, composted manure and steamed bone meal are excellent sources of plant food.

Because the organic nutrients dissolve slowly in water they are released steadily throughout a growing season. In addition, valuable organic matter and micro-nutrients are added to the soil.

If you have your soil tested by the University of Georgia, ask for a copy of "How to Convert an Inorganic Fertilizer Recommendation to an Organic One" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/C853.htm](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/C853.htm)

## **MORE INFORMATION**

University of Georgia plant experts have written a number of excellent publications detailing the care and selection of landscape plants. You can get a free copy from your local Extension service office (404-897-6261). The publications are also online and available for immediate download.

"Fertilization for Lawns" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B710.htm](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B710.htm)

"Home Garden Fruits" <http://pubs.caes.uga.edu/caespubs/pubs/pubsubj.html#Horticulture>

"Home Vegetable Gardening" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/1171-w.html](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/1171-w.html)

"Care of Ornamental Plants in the Landscape" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B1065.htm](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/B1065.htm)

"Flowering Annuals for Georgia Gardens" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b954-w.html](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b954-w.html)

"Flowering Perennials for Georgia Gardens" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b944-w.html](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b944-w.html)

"Flowering Bulbs for Georgia Gardens" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b918-w.html](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b918-w.html)

"Indoor Plants" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b959-w.html](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/b959-w.html)

"Soil Testing" [www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/L387-w.htm](http://www.ces.uga.edu/pubcd/L387-w.htm)

## LAWNS

Key fact: Lawn grasses should be fertilized when the grass is growing vigorously

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Comments
Tall fescue		P	Y	P					P	Y	P		1
Bermudagrass				P	Y	Y	Y	Y	P				1
Centipedegrass				P	Y	P	Y	P					2
Zoysiagrass				P	Y	Y	Y	Y	P				1
St. Augustinegrass				P	Y	Y	Y	Y	P				1

**Legend:** Y = Best month to fertilize P = Possible to fertilize if the situation demands it

### Comments

1. Use any product labeled for turf. Apply exactly according to directions.
2. Use products labeled specifically for centipedegrass.

## ORNAMENTAL SHRUBS

Key fact: Fertilization may stimulate shrubs to grow larger than you desire. Newly planted shrubs need more fertilizer than established ones. Heavy flowering demands additional nutrients.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Comments
Young shrubs			Y		Y		Y						1
Established shrubs			Y		P		P						2
Ornamental grasses			Y		Y		P						2
Groundcovers			Y		P								2

**Legend:** Y = Best month to fertilize P = Possible to fertilize if the situation demands it

### Comments

1. Do not over-fertilize. Follow directions exactly.
2. Slow-release landscape fertilizers are an excellent choice.

## ORNAMENTAL TREES

Key fact: Mature trees do not usually require fertilization unless you want to accelerate growth. Fertilizer does not necessarily help a tree recover from stress. In fact, fertilizing a drought-stressed tree could make it sicker.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Comments
Young Trees			Y				Y						1, 2
Mature trees			P			P							1, 2

**Legend:** Y = Best month to fertilize P = Possible to fertilize if the situation demands it

### Comments

1. Scatter fertilizer under and slightly beyond the spread of tree branches
2. If turf is growing under the tree, split applications to avoid over-feeding the grass.

## FLOWER AND FOLIAGE PLANTS

Key fact: Flowers love to be fed consistently. Match your applications to their vigorous growth periods. Be careful: over-fertilization interferes with blooms.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Comments
Summer annuals (petunia, begonia, impatiens, etc)				Y	Y	Y	P	Y	P				3
Winter annuals (pansy, snapdragon, ornamental cabbage, etc)		Y	Y							Y	Y		2
Warm season perennials (hosta, daylily,				Y	Y			Y	P				3
Cool season perennials (Italian arum, hellebore, etc)		Y	P							Y	P		2
Spring bulbs (daffodil, crocus, hyacinth, etc)			Y	P									1, 3
Summer bulbs (dahlia, gladiolus, caladium, etc)					Y	P	P						3

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### Comments

1. Fertilize bulbs after the flowers first fade, before foliage disappears.
2. Try to find products that contain “nitrate” nitrogen, which is utilized better in cold soils.
3. Slow-release landscape fertilizers are an excellent choice.

## EDIBLES

Key fact: Edible plants vary greatly in their fertilizer needs. The schedule for vegetables is completely different from fruits. Get the University of Georgia publications mentioned nearby to learn all the details.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Comments
Fruit trees (apple, peach, pear, etc)			Y	P	P	Y							1
Pecan		P	Y	P	P	Y							1, 2
Fruit bushes (fig, blueberry, etc)			Y		Y		Y						3
Fruit vines (blackberry, grape, raspberry, etc)			Y	P	Y	P							3, 4
Heavy feeding summer vegetables (potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, etc)				Y	Y	P	Y	Y					4
Medium feeding summer vegetables (squash, corn, bean, etc)				Y	P	Y	P	P					4
Light feeding summer vegetables (Southern pea)				Y	P	P	P						4
Winter vegetables (collards, spinach, turnips, etc)		Y	P							Y	P		4

**Legend:** Y = Best month to fertilize P = Possible to fertilize if the situation demands it

### Comments

1. Use 1 - 2 lb. of 10-10-10 for every inch of trunk thickness
2. Fertilizers containing zinc are preferred for pecans.
3. Use multiple applications only for young plants. Otherwise fertilize in March.
4. A complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 works very well.