

Fertilizing Canberra Gardens

PLEASE NOTE - While fertilizers are an important part of producing healthy plants they can also cause significant environmental damage and should be used carefully. Applying excessive amounts of fertilisers can result in the movement of nutrients into waterways causing algal blooms and other environmental problems.

There are 2 main ways of fertilizing your garden:

- 1) You can use soil improvers to help change the structure of the soil as well as providing nutrients to the plants
- 2) You can provide direct fertilizer to your plants to encourage growth, flowering and fruiting.

SOIL IMPROVERS

Cow or sheep manures, planting compost, 'Healthy Earth' or worm castings can be used as soil improvers. They can

- increase levels of organic matter in the soil
- improve soil structure
- improve water absorption and retention
- increase microbial and worm activity, thus aerating the soil for better root growth
- make nutrients available to the plants in small, manageable doses.

These can be turned through the soil at planting time, or you can top dress with these in spring to provide some extra nutrients for new leaf growth.

FERTILIZERS

The type of fertilizer you use depends on the particular plants you have in your garden.

Slow release fertilizers

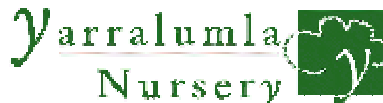
The easiest and safest way of fertilizing is to use a slow release fertilizer. Many of these will only become active when the soil is above a certain temperature or moisture level, so plants will absorb and use them only when they are actively growing and need nutrients most. Most slow release fertilizers contain all the elements required for healthy plant growth and flowering.

Soluble fertilizers

Many of these are used to provide a quick burst of nutrients to plants, and will then leach out of the soil quickly. This type of fertilizing can become expensive and time-consuming because you need to repeat applications. Nutrients leached from this type of fertilizer can cause algal problems in nearby waterways, so care should be taken if you decide to use them. They are generally used on annuals for fast leaf and flower promotion. **Other additions**

Seasol – seaweed based product which helps reduce transplant shock, and can encourage health in unhappy plants. Mix with water and apply after planting or transplanting.

Ash from a wood fire – contains a small amount of Potassium, which is useful for good flowering and/or fruiting. Also good for general health and the strengthening of plant cells. Can be or applied around the base of plants or scattered on top of mulch and watered in.



Banks Street Yarralumla ACT 2600
Phone: 02 62072444 Fax: 02 62072455

ABN: 79 147 985 289

FERTILIZING AUSTRALIAN PLANTS

Many Australian plants grow naturally in soils that are low in nutrients and can suffer from the application of fertilizers that are strong, and/or high in phosphorus. As a general rule, stick with types that contain less than 3% Phosphorus (check the back of the package for details). An application of slow release fertilizer in spring, along with a dose of Sulphate of Potash (high in potassium) will probably be all your native garden needs for the year. Feel free to use soil improvers for soil and plant health.

FERTILIZING EXOTIC PLANTS

The use of general purpose fertilizers is the easiest and safest way to fertilize most exotic trees and shrubs. Of course, there are many types specific to certain plants eg. Camellia and Azalea food. These can be used to provide all the elements in the correct doses, but are not always necessary for good plant growth and flowering. Seek information from a horticulturist about fertilizers for specific plants. Otherwise, simply stick to soil improvers and a general all-purpose slow release fertilizer. Sulphate of Potash can be used to encourage strong stems, and good fruiting and flowering.

WHEN?

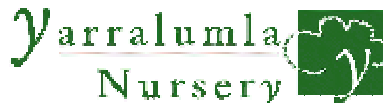
Most plants only use fertilizer when they are actively growing (generally spring, early summer and sometimes early autumn). An application of slow release fertilizer in spring will keep most plants happy for the year. Some exotic plants are 'gross feeders', which will require more fertilizer. Check with a horticulturist for specific requirements.

HOW MUCH?

Recommended application rates can vary; some can be way too high! Applying less than the brand suggests is always safer (both environmentally and for your plants and your pocket). You can reapply if the plants do not respond after about a month.

The following table contains essential plant nutrients and their roles.

Element	Role	Found in the following products
Nitrogen (N)	Leaf growth.	All general purpose fertilisers and animal manures.
Potassium (K)	Strengthens plants and builds up disease resistance. Promotes flowering and fruiting.	Sulphate of Potash seaweed ash.
Phosphorus (P)	Important for flower, fruit, seed and root development.	All general purpose fertilisers, Blood and Bone.
Magnesium (Mg)	Plant food production.	Epsom salts, dolomite.
Calcium (Ca)	Flower formation and healthy root growth. Can cause alkalinity in acid soils.	Lime, slaked lime, gypsum, dolomite.



YARRALUMLA NURSERY – GARDEN ADVICE SERIES

Sulphur (S)	Root growth. Increases soil acidity	Most general purpose fertilizers.
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