Desert Gardening

FERTILIZING TIME FOR YOUR PLANTS AND SOIL

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Is it cool yet? At least we have had some rain to help cool us down along with giving our landscape plants some relief. September and October are busy months for gardening here in Havasu and it helps if the weather is cooperative. Fertilizing and amending the soil is of major importance. Our dry heat along with the high salt content in our water leaches the necessary nutrients in the soil away. Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium are the three primary nutrients and their numbers are seen on fertilizer bags. A 10-10-10 would be considered a “complete” fertilizer since it has equal parts of all three nutrients. However, a “complete” fertilizer is not necessarily what you always want. Let’s look at these three components individually.

- Nitrogen is a macronutrient responsible for leafy growth and protein development in plants.
- Phosphorus is a macronutrient needed for root, flower, seed and fruit development and is responsible for energy transfer in the plant.
- Potassium is a macronutrient responsible for water movement inside plants and plant resistance to environmental stresses.
Hopefully I haven’t lost you yet? Don’t worry the need to become a mad scientist isn’t necessary. Manufacturers of fertilizers have made it easy for us. Rose food may show a 8-10-9 number which is high in phosphorus to promote flowers and roots; citrus food may show 13-10-4 number which is high in nitrogen to promote leafy growth. What is important is that you follow the manufacturer’s instructions precisely in fertilizing since over fertilizing can be worst than under fertilizing. The use of either liquid or dry fertilizers depends on your preference. However, no matter which you use, the soil should be thoroughly moist prior to and after fertilizing so that the nutrients can soak in properly. When to fertilize? September is a good time but only with the temperature permitting and best if below 100 degrees. Common sense needs to come into play here. If we do not receive our cooling trend it may be necessary to wait until October to fertilize. You won’t have to worry about which plants to fertilize since all plants will need a nutrient boost.

Another important factor is to replenish the soil with good compost/organic matter. This is especially important in vegetable gardens and flowerbeds. Be careful in applying manure as a source of organic matter, since it typically contains a high amount of soluble salts. Since our water gives us plenty of this, we do not want to add more of it. Be sure to work in the organic matter well, water and follow the manufacturer’s instructions. Wait several weeks before planting flowers and vegetables so that the nutrients can work themselves in. Remember a good prepared bed will result in a healthy garden.

Don’t forget to visit us at Home Garden Day at the library. The Master Gardeners hosts this on the first Tuesday of every month and we will be there from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm to answer any questions you may have.
This is free and open to the public. Bring photo’s or clippings of any problems you may be having.

_Dottie Holman is a Lake Havasu City Master Gardener. For more information, contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105._

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