

EXTENSION NOTES

1-12-09

Jim Summers, county agent

LSU AgCENTER'S Cooperative Extension Service

Fertilizing Fruit Plants

Early March is an ideal time to fertilize the fruit plants grown on the home grounds. An annual application of fertilizer is crucial to the maintenance of healthy productive fruit plants. Plants must receive sufficient nourishment to replenish root reserves used the previous year.

The leaves produce carbohydrates and other food materials required for fruit production through photosynthesis. When a plant is undernourished it does not produce as many leaves and fruit production is limited. Yellowish or scorched looking leaves are indicators of poor fertilization. Soil conditions vary widely, and as a result, fertilizer recommendations without a soil test are only a general guide. If you are experiencing problems and want accurate recommendations, a soil sample should be submitted to the Extension office for nutrient testing.

Peach and plum trees should receive 1 ½ pounds of 8-8-8 or equivalent fertilizer per year age of tree up to a maximum of 8 pounds. Follow with an application of ½ to 1 pound of ammonium nitrate per year age of tree in June, especially if leaves appear yellowish or shoot growth is limited.

Apples and pears require 1 pound of 8-8-8 or its equivalent per year of tree age, up to 10 pounds. Be cautious and do not over fertilize pears. If the soil is fertile enough for them to produce 6 inches or more of new terminal growth yearly, do not fertilize. Excess growth on pears is highly susceptible to fire blight.

Fig tree fertilization should be based on growth made the previous year. The shoots should grow about 12 to 18 inches each year. In general, 1 pound of 8-8-8 or equivalent per year age of tree should be applied up to a maximum of 10 pounds.

Black berries should be fertilized twice during the season, in late February or early March and when harvest is completed. About ½ pound of 8-8-8 or equivalent per row foot is recommended for the first application. Add ½ pound ammonium nitrate per row foot after harvest.

Blueberries are sensitive to fertilizer. Soils in which blueberries are being grown should be tested at least every two years and fertilization based on this test. Nitrogen sources such as ammonium sulfate should be used on blueberries because they can use it more readily than nitrate forms.

Preparations sold for azaleas and camellias usually contain ammonium sulfate. Add 2 ounces of fertilizer per year age, up to a maximum of 1 pound in February, April and June.

Grapes should receive 1 or 2 pounds of 8-8-8 per vine, depending on the vigor of the vine.

Overly vigorous grapes are not productive. In general, shoots about the size of a pencil are desired. Older vines seem to respond primarily to nitrogen, and a complete fertilizer may not be needed.

For more information concerning fruit and vegetable production contact Jim Summers, county agent with the LSU AgCenter's Cooperative Extension office in LaSalle Parish. The office is located in room 22 of the LaSalle Parish Courthouse and the phone number is 318-992-2205.

His e-mail address is jsummers@agctr.lsu.edu