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GREEN THUMB GARDENING



By **CHRISTINE COLE**

FACTS ABOUT FERTILIZER

All fertilizer packages display three numbers, indicating the percentage of specific nutrients included. They always stand for the same nutrients in the same order. Nitrogen is always first, phosphorus in the middle and potassium last. Nitrogen promotes green, leafy growth. Lawn fertilizers are usually high in this nutrient. However, too much nitrogen applied to a flowering plant will over stimulate vegetative (leafy) growth at the expense of flowers. Or in the worst case scenario you could end up with a dead plant; the casualty of burned roots. Also, keep in mind that nitrogen is water soluble and is therefore not stock-piled in the soil. It is leached out of the soil by rain and watering and will have to be given to the plant on a regular basis. Phosphorus encourages root development, flower formation and seed development. As such, transplanter fertilizers and fertilizer for flowers and fruits are higher in the middle number than the other two numbers. Potassium (the last number of the three) promotes strong branches and stems as well as resistance to low temperatures. You can think of it as the "Body Builder" of the plant world.

When application directions are followed carefully, fertilizers promote healthy, vigorous growth. Healthy plants will withstand the invasion of insects and diseases much better than a plant struggling to survive. And these plants withstand the rigors of winter much better too.

Once the frost is out of the soil in the spring you can begin applying fertilizer. When you begin to apply fertilizer is not as critical as knowing when to stop fertilizing. If you continue to fertilize too late in the season, the new growth that it encourages, does not have enough time to "harden off" for the winter. Therefore, these plants are at a disadvantage getting through the winter without damage. Usually mid to late August is the last time fertilizer should be applied (this may differ depending on the fertilizer you are using.)

Each week Christine Cole of Tuitman's Garden Centre and Landscaping, Highway 25, 1 mile south of Acton, 853-2480, will be presenting helpful tips and information to assist you in creating your garden show-place!

**TUITMAN'S
GARDEN CENTRE**

ACTON

853-2480