

Understanding Fertilizer for the Landscape

As the debate continues whether adding fertilizer to the soil is beneficial or it is just plain evil. Your take on using organic or inorganic fertilizer will depend on who you listen to or what you read. This article is not to convince anyone to add or not to add inorganic synthetic fertilizer to the landscape. Fertilizer can be broken down into organic and inorganic. Organic fertilizer is derived from plants and animal materials such as manure and compost while inorganic are derived from synthesized materials that are not related to plants or animals. In other words, inorganic or artificial fertilizers are made in a laboratory.

Adding fertilizer to the soil is like adding money to a bank account; if we keep withdrawing from our account without making any depositing soon or later there will be no money. The same is true; plants take nutrients from the soil daily therefore it is important that we add supplemental nutrients to the soil. Doing a soil sample testing is the only way to determine whether or not a soil is lacking in one or more nutrients. This test can be done with the UF/IFAS Extension.

Organic fertilizer- is an inexpensive means to add nutrients to the soil. Adding horse, cow, or chicken manures are excellent means by which nutrients can be added to the soil. It is good to ensure that manures undergo the proper heating and broken down before adding to the soil. Manures that are not properly broken down can transfer weed seeds to the landscape. Making a compost heap to supply nutrients is an excellent way to add nutrients to the soil.

Inorganic fertilizer- makes nutrients readily available to plants compared to organic fertilizer which must convert to the inorganic form before it can be available to plants. On a fertilizer bag there are the letters NPK; N is for Nitrogen, P is for Phosphorus, K is for Potassium. Nitrogen is important in making the plant green, phosphorus contributes to strong roots, while potassium contributes to the overall health of the plant.

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