

## GUIDELINES FOR FERTILIZING VEGETABLES

Sweet corn, tomatoes, peppers, squash, okra and green beans need more nitrogen than often recommended for a general garden plot. It is good to make sure the soil has sufficient nitrogen at the time of planting. If the soil is heavy in organic material – peat, manure, mulch, and compost – then reduce the amount of initial fertilizer. It is generally recommended that one-third to one-half pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft of garden plot be applied. Fertilizer is generally not available as pure 100% nitrogen. When using blended fertilizers or lawn fertilizers, look at the nitrogen content on the bag. For example, if the fertilizer is 30% nitrogen, use 2 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 sq ft of garden plot. Make sure the lawn fertilizer does not contain a weed killer, such as weed -and-feed., or the vegetable plants will be damaged.

It is recommended that the initial fertilizer be supplemented after the vegetable plants are established. The timing of the application of the extra nitrogen is important since extra nitrogen causes a lot of extra leaf growth. Applying extra nitrogen fertilizer to tomatoes and peppers too early in the growing season can cause the plants to produce all foliage and no fruit.

Once tomatoes and pepper plants bear fruit that is about one inch in diameter, applying the extra nitrogen fertilizer will produce great benefit. Squash plants will benefit from extra nitrogen when the runners are approximately one foot long. Corn will benefit when the stalks are about one foot tall.

For the supplemental fertilizing, it is recommended that about one pound of nitrogen be applied to 1,000 sq ft of garden plot. For example, if the fertilizer is 30% nitrogen, use 3 1/2 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 sq ft of garden plot.

It is not necessary to spread the fertilizer over your entire garden plot. It is more economical and more effective to apply it in 2-4 inch bands along the rows of vegetable plants. It should be worked into the soil and then watered in. This is referred to as “side dressing”. For larger plants, sprinkle the fertilizer in a one foot diameter circle around the base of the plants and slightly work it in and water it in.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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