

RJB Fact Sheet Number 9

It is important to apply regular fertiliser to established plants in order to maintain balanced and healthy growth.

Containerised plants purchased from a nursery/garden centre in most cases will have a controlled release fertiliser in the compost and therefore should not require any fertiliser for two years after planting.

One major issue is that gardeners very often apply too much fertiliser to the established plant, which cannot be retained by the soil or used by the plant quickly, sadly the surplus fertiliser drains into low waterways in the soil potentially causing pollution - which is not acceptable.

One method of preventing pollution and maintaining balanced and healthy growth is to use a 'Nutra Ball' The 'Nutra Ball' has the following advantages:

- It will not pollute the soil.
- Plant nutrients are supplied over an 18 month period to the plant.
- It is possible to add the 'Nutra Ball' to the base of the plant, the plant nutrient will be moved horizontally in the soil by water movement. This is important as the feeding roots are often some distance from the main stem of the established plant.

It is possible make up a 'Nutra Ball' in the following way:

- Lay two segments of kitchen towel on the table.
- Apply vermiculite to just cover the two segments of the kitchen towel.
- Apply a general fertiliser to the vermiculite. A small handful of fertiliser is required such as 'Maxicrop' granules or 'Vitax Q4' granules.
- Wrap up the kitchen towel to make a small parcel which is held together by two rubber bands.

The principle of how this works is that the paper towel and the rubber bands will rot away relatively quickly. The vermiculite will hold onto the plant nutrients preventing rapid leaching of the nutrient in the soil. The action of water in the soil will slowly release the nutrients over an 18 month period in most soils.

The 'Nutra Ball' should be planted ideally on the drip line of the established shrub. If using with a hedge it is recommended that they are spaced out every 1 m and planted 10 cm deep in the soil.

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