

Rhododendron Basics: Fertilizer

(part 2) Source: American Rhododendron Society

Plants need three major nutrients—nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K)—and several minor nutrients. The proportions of the major nutrients are listed in order (N-P-K) on the label under “Guaranteed analysis.” For example, a 10-8-6 fertilizer contains 10 percent nitrogen, 8 percent phosphorus, and 6 percent potassium. Because it contains all three major nutrients, it is called a complete fertilizer.

At nurseries and garden centers, you will find the general-purpose fertilizers and the ones labeled specifically for azaleas and rhododendrons. The specialty fertilizers are formulated to acidify the soil, and usually derive their nitrogen from ammonium sulfate. That is useful if your soil is not naturally acidic, but if your soil is already in the right range for azaleas and rhododendrons, there’s little advantage to an acid fertilizer. In such cases, general-purpose fertilizers work as well and usually cost less.

Commercial fertilizers come in either granular or liquid form. Granular fertilizers are usually cheaper, and are made to be scattered over the root zone two or three times each year. To encourage roots to grow out into native garden soil, sprinkle the fertilizer in a wide, doughnut-shaped band straddles the edge of the drip line (the drip line is outside edge of the plant). Scatter it over the mulch and water it in.

Liquid fertilizer usually comes as soluble granules that you dissolve in water for application. It can be used two ways: sprayed onto the leaves (that is called foliar feeding), or as a drench poured over the roots. Because liquid fertilizer is much less concentrated than granular, and because it flushes through the soil faster, you have to apply it more frequently—as often as once every week or two during the growing season. The nitrogen in liquid fertilizers is usually derived from urea, which can be absorbed through plant leaves. Do foliar feeding in the cool of the morning when the sun is not directly shining on the foliage, when leaves are better able to take it in.

In principle, it is best not to feed plants with high nitrogen after mid-summer, since fertilizer encourages plants to put on new growth that may not harden off in time to withstand fall frosts. Young plants need extra fertilizer to get established quickly, while mature plants do not usually need much at all. Here is a schedule that will give you healthy plants that bloom well and hold up to the vicissitudes of climate.

At planting time - Before planting, some azalea and rhododendron specialists dig fertilizer into the soil. One good formula fortifies the planting soil with greensand for potassium, composted manure for nitrogen, and rock phosphate for phosphorus. The rock phosphate is important, since phosphorus is difficult to get into the root zone after planting (it doesn’t move through the soil easily). Apply all ingredients according to label directions.

When a newly planted azalea or rhododendron drops its lower leaves, it is usually because the plant had to use up the nutrient reserves it stored there. Feed the plant by sprinkling a complete fertilizer such as a 10-10-6 plus trace elements on top of the soil before you water the plant in. Apply 1 tablespoon per foot of growth; in other words, give a 2-foot plant 2 tablespoons of complete fertilizer.

In early spring - As buds swell (but well before bloom) apply 10-8-6 granular rhododendron fertilizer or complete slow-release fertilizer. Some slow release fertilizers release in response to warmer temperatures and may not be effective in cooler weather. Read the label. It takes about a handful per mature plant to do the job, but “do not put it on any heavier than you would put salt on your corn or sugar on your grapefruit”. If you are after more precision, a good rule of thumb is to apply one level tablespoon of fertilizer per foot of plant growth.

At leaf emergence - New leaves start growing just as blooms fade. After they unfold completely, apply another light dose of 10-8-6 or foliar fertilizer, especially if new leaves look pale.

In fall - Most plants do not usually need fall feeding, but they may benefit from top dressing with rotted manure in October. If you have plants that didn’t put on much growth and look like they need a boost, you can give them a dose of 5-10-10 granular fertilizer.

- For greening of pale leaves: Use a foliar feed like Miracle Grow.
- For chlorotic younger leaves: usually an iron deficiency. Use chelated iron foliar feed or blood meal.
- For chlorotic other foliage: usually a magnesium or manganese deficiency. For magnesium deficiencies, you can directly apply Epsom salts (Magnesium sulfate) to the soil lightly around the drip line or dissolve 1-2 tablespoons. Epsom salts to a gallon of warm water and drench the soil. For manganese use barnyard manure.



Burnaby Lake butterfly garden gets new edition

By Diane Hayward-Meek

(source: *Metro Vancouver Regional Parks newsletter*)

Every year the butterfly garden at Burnaby Lake keeps expanding and getting more beautiful and 2008 was no exception! Thanks to the vision and many volunteer hours of Judy Wellington and the master gardeners and volunteers that weed, water, plant, and tend the garden every year.

During 2008 the Butterfly Garden received many lovely updates. Last spring, one of the new additions to the Butterfly Garden was a pergola / arbour near the footbridge at the garden. This wonderful new feature was made possible by a very generous donation of \$1,100 from the Burnaby Rhododendron [and Gardens] Society.

In the summer, youth volunteers from the Catching the Spirit program made and decorated stepping stones which now line several small new paths that invite visitors to wander quietly into the garden for a closer look at the beautiful flowers, and the butterflies, bees and other insects that thrive in this tiny oasis.

This garden continues to be a living legacy to its founder, Bob Gardner, who would be so pleased to see the love, and attention that the garden still receives and the enjoyment it brings to so many visitors.

Thank You,
Thank You,



BRAGS would like to thank our March speaker Gwen Odematt for letting us know about Great Plant Picks.

The website www.greatplantpicks.org provides useful recommendations for plant choices according to growing conditions.



Plant Sale is on Sunday April 19, 2009 at 9-1pm, rain or shine. Volunteers: please bring gloves and some plant trays or cardboard lids for customers to carry plants.

Rhodofest is on Sunday May 3, 2009 at 9:30am – 4pm. Come and join the annual celebration of spring in Burnaby. There will be plenty of workshops and seminars (including our very own Norbert Wuensche in the “Adopt-A-Rhodo & Rhododendron Culture Workshop.”), bouquet competition, tours, children activities, local nurseries, and tons of exhibitors. Watch for pullout program in Burnaby Newsleader on Saturday, April 25 – bring it with you to the festival.

FYI: the new updated Beekeeping Bylaw for Burnaby was presented to the Burnaby Council Meeting at Burnaby City Hall on Monday, March 23. We haven't heard the result yet.

ATTENTION ALL PICNICKERS!



Dust off the mosquito nets! After a short hiatus, the BRAGS picnic is making a comeback! The plan is to have a picnic on a Sunday in August, locally, preferably at a members garden, and in the ‘pot-luck’ format.

At this point we are looking for a member with a large, ‘crowd friendly’ garden, who is willing to open up their garden for an afternoon of visiting with club members and their significant others. As we are in the planning stage, options and suggestions are welcome.

If you think you have the garden suitable for this function, and would be willing to ‘host’ the picnic, please contact Cheryl Fiddis to discuss further. Please note the ‘garden host’ will not be expected to feed the group!

As in the past, everyone will bring a dish to share, and a chair to sit on.

Let me know what you all think and if you are interested in attending this gala event!

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Out and About

March 29, 10am – 5pm Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival, VanDusen Floral Hall, Ikebana hands-on lessons for the public

April 4-5, 1- 4pm THE ANNUAL TUBER SALE Vancouver Dahlia Society at VanDusen Garden

April 11-12, 12-4pm, Alpine Garden Club of B.C. Annual Spring Show VanDusen Garden Floral Hall, Oak & 37th Avenue, Vancouver, free admission

April 18, 10am - 12pm, Sale of dahlia cuttings by Point Grey Chrysanthemum Association, VanDusen Garden

April 18-19, 12-5pm, Vancouver Ikebana Association Spring Show, Oakridge Centre Auditorium (41st and Cambie). Demonstrations 1pm and 3pm, admission \$6.00

April 23, 6:30pm, UBC Botanical Garden Collector's Plant Auction & Gala 6804 SW Marine Drive. For information, call 604.822.4208 . Proceeds from the event will go to support the Garry Oak Meadow and Woodland Project.

April 25, 10am – 12pm Dunbar Garden club plant sale. 37th and Highbury.

April 25, 11am – 1:30pm, Maple Ridge Garden Club plant, bake and craft sale, St. Patrick's Hall (22561 121 Avenue, Maple Ridge)

April 25-26, 10am-3pm, Vancouver Rhododendron Society Show and Sale, Park and Tilford Garden, Main Street, North Vancouver.

April 26, 11am-3pm, Fraser Valley Rhododendron Society Show and Sale, Whonnock Lake Centre, Maple Ridge (113th Ave, East of 272nd St). Follow signs to Whonnock Lake from 272nd St. A new feature this year will be the attendance of "Master Gardeners" who will be pleased to answer your gardening & plant queries. Come along & check out our first class Rhododendrons, Companion plants, Azaleas, Maples, Native Plants, Garden Crafts, Concession & Refreshments. Those who have attended our sale & show in previous years know that this is an event not to be missed. Come early to avoid disappointment!

April 26, Annual Club Plant Sale South Burnaby Garden club.

Next speaker at the meeting on April 1

Laura Ralph, Head Gardener at the Eagles Estate Heritage Garden, will be giving an update on ongoing projects and current state of the **Eagles Estate Heritage Garden** in Burnaby. One new initiative at the Eagles is the introduction of a series of workshops which will enhance the use of the Garden as an educational resource for the community.



We still need volunteers for fund raising and garden contest. If you are interested in any of these positions, please contact one of the executive members.