

# Homegrown Horticulture

TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

## Fertilizing Fruiting Plants

Trees, shrubs, and other types

Most of the time, your average gardeners will tend to ignore the fruit-bearing plants in the yard once they are planted (if they had a hand in planting them), other than picking the fruit. And, for the most part, that is probably okay for the majority of fruiting plants in an urban setting. Those plants aren't being pushed to maximize fruit production, and aren't being pruned regularly, requiring more nutrients to fuel a replacement of plant parts.

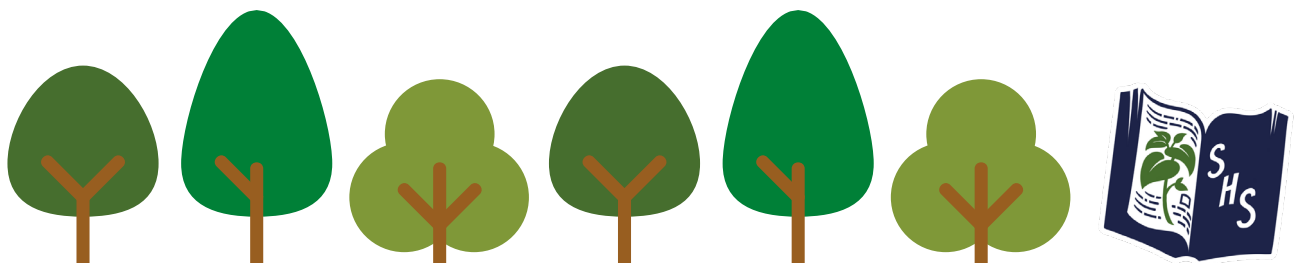
As a general rule, most of our woody fruiting trees and shrubs don't need a huge amount of fertilizer to maintain healthy growth and productivity for decades. You are better off making sure that they have enough water in the dry periods, and that they are mulched around the bases. Prune out dead, diseased, or dying branches.

If you are going to fertilize, you might give them a bit of a boost every once in a while, applying a few pounds of fertilizer as a spike or a slow-release granular product. Apply granular or solid stake products around the base of the plant, out at the dripline. Apply synthetic fertilizers in the spring and early summer, NOT later in the summer. Fertilizing late in the season can lead to a late-season flush of growth that does not adequately harden off before winter. If you are going to work in some composted manure, it is best to do that in the fall, so that it can break down over winter.

Shorter-lived and more actively growing perennial fruit like strawberries and raspberries will benefit from more attention to fertilizer. This is because they tend to have shallower root systems and because they are producing more new growth each year. With a higher weight of fruit production compared to their relative plant size, they will probably use up nutrients in the soil faster than a bigger plant, at least within easy reach of their roots.

### Calculating the amount of fertilizer to apply:

Since you aren't going to be applying fertilizer to wide areas, the overall amount you apply will be very small. The amount of product that you apply should vary depending on the nutrient analysis of the product that you are using. However, as a general rule, just sprinkle  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cup (65-125mL) of all-purpose granular product around the base of larger fruiting bushes and trees, out around the edge of the plant canopy. For more specific directions and timing, see below.





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## Tree Fruit (Apples, etc.)

Most big fruit trees aren't going to need a huge amount of fertilizer. Occasionally work in a bit of composted manure into the soil around their base in the fall before freeze-up or put on a cup of all-purpose fertilizer (up to 10% N, P, K) for every 5 or 6 feet out around the edge of the tree canopy. Fertilizers should be applied in the spring or early summer, avoiding applying any later than that. This ensures that the plant won't have a late flush of growth and will still go into dormancy.

## Bush fruit (Saskatoon berries, currants, etc.)

Bush fruit can benefit from a bit of nitrogen and phosphorus applied each spring. You could apply about a ¼ cup (65mL) of a granular fertilizer (with 5-10% of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) per plant in early to mid-May and then again towards the end of June. This amount should work for most fruiting shrubs on the Canadian Prairies. If you are seeing little new growth (less than 6in/15cm), or have done some heavier pruning, you might increase the amount a bit. If you don't add fertilizer every year, it isn't a huge deal.

## Raspberries (Florican-type = Summer-bearing)

Florican-type (summer-bearing) raspberries have a 2-year cycle, with new vegetative (non-fruiting) canes being produced to replace the spent ones each year. Put on about a ½ cup of all-purpose fertilizer (with up to 10% of N, P, K) for every 4 feet of row. Apply it just after snow melt (as they are just waking up), and then again in mid-late May.

## Raspberries (Primocane-type = Fall-bearing)

Primocane-type (fall-bearing) raspberries have to push out new vegetative canes every spring, rushing to reach a certain amount of growth before they switch to fruiting. As a result, they need a bit more nutrients than the florican-types. Put on about ¾ cup of all-purpose fertilizer (with up to 10% N, P, K) for every 4 feet of row, once at snow melt and then again in mid-May.

## Strawberries

June-bearing strawberries have a multi-year cycle and should be fertilized in the spring and then after harvest (the best time would be in the first part of August). This helps with the burst of growth in the spring, and replaces nutrients lost at harvest. The second application helps them as they prepare to make the plant parts that will be next year's fruit. Put about an 1/8 of a cup of all-purpose fertilizer (up to 10% N, P, K) for every 3-4 feet of row in early May. Then put on about ½ cup of fertilizer right after harvest is done (probably in mid to late-July), and about 1/8 cup in early-mid August.

Day neutral strawberries are shallower rooted and are continuously growing leaves, runners, and flowers/fruit, so they will need a fairly steady supply of nutrients all season long. Put on about 1/8 of a cup of fertilizer for every 3-4 feet of row every month. You can spread it out over the month if you want to. DN strawberries are often a 1 year crop, so they are pushed hard.

