

## Apply Fertilizer Correctly



When you read your favorite gardening book or even the back of a seed envelope, you will often find specific instructions for applying the necessary fertilizer. Some of the terms used may be confusing to you. As an example, a seed envelope might say something like: "Green beans are a moderate feeder, so band 1/4 cup of a complete organic fertilizer per foot of row." You might be wondering, what does the term "band" mean?

Here are three of the most basic fertilizer application techniques mentioned in gardening books, seed packets and fertilizer packages that might mystify home gardeners:

**Band:** Place the fertilizer in a trench about three inches deep. The corner of a hoe works well to make the trench. Sow seeds an inch-and-a-half to two inches above and to the side of the fertilizer. The plant roots quickly absorb the nutrients and grow rapidly.

**Broadcast:** Scatter the fertilizer uniformly over the surface. If an application method is not mentioned, broadcasting is implied.

**Sidedress:** Scatter the fertilizer material close to growing plants. Keep the fertilizer granules off leaves to prevent burning. Nitrogen is very soluble and need not be mixed with the soil. A fertilizer blend containing nitrogen, phosphate and potash should be lightly scratched in, but take care to avoid damaging plant roots. Water the plants so they can absorb the nutrients.

There are also some other basic strategies that need to be kept in mind when applying fertilizer to your home landscape. The nitrogen in chemical fertilizers is highly water-soluble and is carried to the roots by irrigation and rain. Thus, you don't need to mix these materials into the soil, but you do need to water your garden if rain doesn't fall within a day after you apply them. Organic sources of nitrogen are most accessible to plants if mixed into the top 2-3 inches of soil.

Phosphate moves slowly in the soil. So, you will obtain best results by banding phosphate-containing fertilizer two inches below the seed when you plant or by tilling it into the soil during spring preparation. Work potassium fertilizers into the soil using the banding or broadcast methods. Do not allow potassium fertilizers to contact plant roots.

This article adapted from Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, USDA. Please contact the Farm Advisor's office at [cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cdcalaveras@ucdavis.edu) or 754-6477 with your agricultural questions. Talk to a certified Master Gardener every Wednesday, 10:00-12:00, 754-2880.