

A Tea Party for Plants!

In my bulging file labeled “Roses” is a recipe for alfalfa tea, requiring a 32-gallon, leak-proof garbage can with a TIGHT lid. The demand for a tight lid told me this would be an odiferous concoction so I pass. More determined gardeners may continue by adding 12 cups of alfalfa meal or pellets **or** a ten pound sack of cow chips, horse apples, or sack of manure.

Fill to near the top with water and stir with a pole. A broom handle would be appropriate for this Good Witch brew and to avoid a possible reaction with metal, a plastic container would be best. Steep for a few days, re-stir, steep, re-stir. After a week you have a green fermentation solution with a foamy consistency.

Rather than lemon or cream you may add one cup of organic 10-10-10 fertilizer and one-half cup of Epsom salts to the mix. When applied at the rate of a gallon to a large rose every six weeks during the spring and summer your garden will glow! As a rose is just a plant you can assume this formula can be helpful wherever it is poured. Alfalfa contains a growth hormone called triacontanol as well as an organic base on which soil organisms can feed. When I think of it, I work alfalfa meal into the soil around my few roses but the tea is quicker.

There are other recipes for various compost teas that enhance plant vigor by adding trace elements to the soil and recently several master gardeners have been excited by a mix prepared by Brent & Becky’s Bulbs called “Soil Soup” This solution is to be diluted with water to varying degrees depending on its use. For instance, when applied by a hose-end sprayer to a lawn, it is diluted approximately 10 to 1 and used every two weeks during spring and once a month summer and fall.

This solution is a treatment for poor, underperforming soils as well as a tonic to use as a foliar boost, covering top and bottom of rose leaves, for example. Reading the application guidelines makes me think it is time I gave the potted “edibles” a new lease on life. Actually the blueberries seem to be doing adequately year after year, a delight to the birds since I do prefer blueberries more than half-ripe and that is the stage at which they disappear. The delicate pomegranate was new last summer and had lots of bright coral flowers over the season but no fruit. **There were several figs on the new container plant** and that is just fine since the foliage alone justifies the watering. That is the extent of my orchard but to share a secret, sometimes less is more.

It is important to remember that in using any kind of growth stimulant, too much can be a disaster. The lush growth that results is susceptible to damage from fire blight for one thing. You will recognize it if you have it because the branch of your pear tree (to mention one of the species most affected) will look as if it had been scorched with blackened leaves at the ‘hooked’ end. Fire blight is caused by bacteria, *Erwinia amylovora*, spread by wind, rain, birds, and bugs. It is necessary to cut off the afflicted limb quickly before a canker is formed. Use a bleach solution to keep tools clean and cut several inches into healthy wood as a precaution.

Pears, apples, and their relatives the Rose and Hawthorne are most likely to catch this nuisance. I over-pruned a crabapple which really needed limbing up so I am keeping an eye on the new growth.

Growers of orchards may choose to spray pears and apples in spring with an antibiotic as preventive medicine. Before the antibiotic age, old orchards were treated with copper compounds when dormant. If you anticipate growing fruit, check the catalogs for cultivars resistant to fire blight.

The ticks have arrived... If you have children or pets you know ticks arrive in waves so vigilance is important. There are sprays that can be used on your shoes and pant legs that will ward them off to a degree but you still have to check. The seed ticks are the hardest to find and also hard to dislodge without taking a bit of skin as well. You know they like warm places, under belts etc. Although I read that one must avoid tall grass I collect ticks without having grass so I suspect ticks are everywhere. However, staying inside is not an option so be reassured that if you develop a ring or rash at the site of a bite, there is a med that prevents Lyme disease if taken as soon as the rash appears.