



Soil Test Note 21: Home Fruit Trees

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Introduction

Your Soil Test Report provides information on the amount of lime required for optimum tree growth and also indicates whether a Complete or Nitrogen-Only Fertilizer will be needed. The amount of fertilizer to apply is contained in this leaflet.

At Planting

No fertilizer is recommended at the time of planting. Fertilization will cause excessive weed growth (weeds will compete with the young trees for water) and may also injure the tree if fertilizer is placed in the hole at planting.

Established Trees

1. Complete Fertilizer Recommended

If your soil test report indicates that a *Complete Fertilizer* is needed, in March apply ½ lb. (1 cup) of 10-10-10 fertilizer per tree for each year of the tree's age. For example, if a tree is 4 years old, 2 lbs. of 10-10-10 will be needed (4 years x ½ lb. of 10-10-10 per year = 2 lbs. of 10-10-10). Repeat fertilizer application in April. Do not apply more than 10 lbs. of 10-10-10 fertilizer per tree annually.

2. Nitrogen-Only Fertilizer Recommended

If your soil test report indicates that a *Nitrogen-Only Fertilizer* is needed, in March apply ¼ lb. (½ cup) of nitrate of soda per tree for each year of tree's age. For example, if a tree is 4 years old, 1 lb. of nitrate of soda will be needed (4 years x ¼ lb. of nitrate of soda per year = 1 lb.

of nitrate of soda). Repeat fertilizer application in April. Do not apply more than 5 lbs. of nitrate of soda per tree annually.

Method of Fertilizer Application

Scatter fertilizer evenly under the tree, starting about 1 foot from the trunk and extending to just beyond the tips of the branches.

Adjusting Fertilizer Rates for Individual Tree Growth

Annual terminal growth and general vigor of the individual tree should be used as a guide to determine whether any modification in fertilizer application rate will be needed. The average amount of terminal growth considered adequate for various fruit trees is found in the following table.

Table 1. Length of annual terminal growth considered adequate for normal growth in inches.

Fruit Species	Bearing Trees	Non-Bearing Trees
Apple, Pear, Quince, Plum, Sour Cherry	8-10	15-20
Peach, Nectarine, Sweet Cherry	10-15	20-30

If growth the previous year was **excessive**:

Eliminate the April Fertilizer application and make just one fertilizer application in March.

If growth the previous year was **short**:

Make an additional fertilizer application in May for a total of 3 fertilizer applications (i.e., 1 each in March, April and May).

Note - Avoid over-application! Too much fertilizer will cause excessive foliage development, poor fruit growth, and make some fruit species more susceptible to disease.

Additional Information

For more information, consult Tree Fruit in the Home Garden, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) publication 426-841 (SPES-259P) at <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/> or contact your local VCE office. Contact information for your local Extension office appears on the upper left of a soil test report.

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2023

452-721 (SPES-489NP)