

Lily Notes

Lily Libations

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What, when and how do you fertilize lilies? (No need to do anything special, and the daffodils, tulips, etc., will love you.) Rules of thumb for fertilizing lilies follow.

What do lilies like?

Most prefer a pH level of 6.0 to 7.0, nothing above 8.0. Fertilizer has three major food groups: nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K). A bulb wants more nitrogen when it is preparing to bloom. While blooming, it likes a balanced mix. Once blooms have faded, feed it with phosphorous and potassium to beef up the bulb for the next year.

While views on feeding lilies vary, several written resources and talks with growers led to some simple and easy suggestions:

- *Let's Grow Lilies: An Illustrated Handbook of Lily Culture*, North American Lily Society, Virginia Howe, author, suggests 20N-20P-20K.
- *Lilies: A Guide for Growers and Collectors*, by Edward Austin McRae, suggests balanced fertilizers such as, 12-12-12, or 15-15-15, or 20-20-20.
- *John E. Bryan on Bulbs* suggests 10-5-5 to start (basically two parts nitrogen to one part each of phosphorus and potassium). If it is a wet spring, you could bump up the nitrogen. During the main growing season, use a balanced formula. In late summer and early fall, go with 0-10-10.

Somewhere, I learned that lilies like to be fertilized like potatoes. I have started using a formula close to 0-25-25 in the late summer. The co-op kindly mixes 50 pounds: 22 pounds of monoammonium phosphate 11-52-0 with 28 pounds of muriate potash 0-0-60. This roughly comes out to 5-25-30. Warning: do not expect miracles overnight. This bulb-building formula works slowly over years (as in five).

Many garden club members have had great success with lilies without fertilizing. Others use compost as a top dressing, and that's it. Well-rotted horse or cow manure (spring feeding), leaf mold and compost are great. Still others use only Miracle Grow. Finally, many growers use time-released granules.

When should lilies be fertilized, and how often?

Start fertilizing after the last threat of frost. Some people fertilize every two weeks before a show. Check the calendar and pace the timing so blooms will just be beginning to peak at show time. If not competing, you might just give a spring, summer and fall feeding. Or you might give even less: one slow-release application, and call it quits.

How should lilies be fertilized?

I use granular fertilizer and sprinkle it on top of the soil, then water thoroughly. To prevent burning, avoid getting fertilizer in the tender tip or on the leaves. Some people use a diluted solution and spray. Avoid spraying buds and blossoms.

Above all, lilies are heavy feeders and will appreciate anything you do for them. 🌸