What Should You Look for in a Palm Fertilizer?

Palms require very different fertilizing needs than other landscape plants. When selecting a palm fertilizer, it is important that macro-nutrients such as nitrogen (N), potassium (K) and magnesium (Mg) are in 100% slow release form. These slow release forms will break down slowly over time lasting about 2 to 3 months.

Slow-release fertilizers also lessen the chance of burning roots in times of drought. Slow-release forms of nitrogen include sulfur-coated urea, resin-coated urea, resin-coated ammonium salts and urea-formaldehyde. Slow-release forms of potassium include sulfur-coated potassium sulfate. Slow-release forms of magnesium includes prilled kieserite. Palms should have at least 4% magnesium.

Palm fertilizers should also contain micro-nutrients as well. Micro-nutrients are available in small percentages but are just as important as macro-nutrients. Essential micro-nutrients include iron (Fe), manganese (Mn) and boron (B). Boron should be in a slow-release form such as Granubor. Other micro-nutrients should be water-soluble or a quick release form.

How Much Fertilizer Should I Use?

The general application rate for palms is 1.5 lbs. per 100 sq. ft. of canopy every 3 months. The formulation recommended for palm trees for this application is 8N-2P-12K+4Mg. Fertilize between the months of March and September in Sumter County. Be sure to read and follow directions completely when applying fertilizer.
How Should I Apply the Fertilizer?

Applying fertilizer correctly is just as important as using the right fertilizer. Success and a healthy palm depend on proper application. Avoid using a concentration of fertilizer in holes or spikes around the palm. Banding is also not recommended. These techniques are not as effective because nutrient movement in soil is mostly downward. Apply fertilizer evenly around the drip line of the palm tree. This is where the feeder roots are growing. Never apply fertilizer directly next to the trunk of a palm.

What to Avoid

Common improper fertilization practices can lead to nutrient deficiencies in landscape palms. Severe deficiencies can be very harmful and can lead to the palms demise.

Do not use turf fertilizer on or near palm roots. Palm roots can actually extend to over 50 ft. from the trunk of the palm. Turf fertilizer can induce K and/or Mg deficiencies in the palms. To solve this problem mulch out to the drip line of the palm or use the recommended 8-2-12 palm fertilizer on your turfgrass. Studies have shown that applying a quality blend of 8-2-12 on St. Augustine provides the same quality as a high grade turf fertilizer. The recommended 8-2-12 formulation can also be used on many other landscape trees and shrubs. Avoid the use of Epsom salts on palm trees as a standalone fertilizer or in addition to a complete palm fertilizer. Epsom salts contain quick release water soluble magnesium sulfate. For palm trees, use only a 100% slow release form of magnesium such as prilled kieserite.

References:
“Fertilization of Field-grown and Landscape Palms in Florida”
Timothy K. Broschat
EDIS Publication ENH 1009

Empire Zoysia grass fertilized with 8-2-12 +4 palm fertilizer