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# Fertilizing Fruit Trees

## General recommendation for all fruits

Maintain a soil pH between 6.0 – 6.5. A starter fertilizer (usually mixed with water) or a pinch of bone meal may be added to the planting hole, but do not add fertilizer. Most nurseries will not honor tree warranties if any fertilizer has been added to the planting hole.

Three weeks after planting, or after rain has settled soil well around roots and soil has been leveled to surrounding terrain, spread ½ pound of 10-10-10 in a circle 18” to 24” from trunk. In each subsequent year, make a split application: half at the end of April, remaining half at the end of May, using either:

- 10-10-10 at the rate of one pound per inch of trunk diameter, measured one foot from the ground up to a maximum of 2½ lbs. 10-10-10 per year, or
- spread a 6” band of calcium nitrate within the dripline of branches, at a rate of 2/3 pound per 1” of trunk diameter *and* broadcast sulfate of potash-magnesia (sul-po-mag) at ½ pound per 1” trunk diameter. Do not exceed maximum of 1 ¾ lb. calcium nitrate, or 1¼ lb. sul-po-mag per tree.

## Apples

Young apple trees (1-3 years) should grow 12” or more per year. If they are growing less than that increase the fertilizer in years 2 and 3 by 50%. For trees 4 years and older, apply nitrogen according to growth: If there is less than 6” of growth, use rates as described above. If there is more than 12” of growth, apply sul-po-mag (and boron if needed) only. Do not apply 10-10-10 or Calcium nitrate.

**Apply Borax every 3 years:** 4 oz for a young tree ready to bear, 8 oz for a medium tree, 12 oz for a large tree. Old fashioned borax is 11.1% boron. Check the percentage of boron in the product you buy. If it is 15%, reduce the rate by a third. If it is 20% boron, reduce the rate by half. Weigh the material to be sure you do not overapply as excessive boron can be toxic to trees.

## Pears

Fertilize pear trees according to growth and soil testing. Fertilize trees that grew less than 6” the previous year with 1 pound of calcium nitrate in the spring. Have soil tested every three years to determine need for potassium and magnesium; use sul-po-mag according to lab recommendations.

Too much growth increases susceptibility with fire blight. **Do not apply nitrogen** to pear trees older than 3 years old growing more than 12” per year; use sul-po-mag only if a soil test recommends it.

## Stone fruits (peaches, plums, cherries, apricots)

If the tree has not set a crop, do not fertilize. If there’s good fruit set, fertilize with one pound calcium nitrate per tree or 1 ½ lb. 10-10-10.

*original fact sheet by Virginia Hast & William G. Lord, Extension Fruit Specialist, edited, reformatted 2/01*

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