

## Feeding indoor plants

Making house plants thrive doesn't require a vast reserve of skill or knowledge, just a grasp of a few basic principles.

### Feeding

House plants require a specially formulated house-plant fertiliser, either as a liquid or slow-release solid pellet or stick inserted into the potting compost. Liquid feeding should begin in the spring and continue through the summer months before stopping in autumn to allow for the plant's natural slowdown in growth over the winter.

### Specialist fertilisers

Many different plant species are grown as house plants and they require different types of food to thrive. Choose a fertiliser that is specifically formulated for the type of plant that you are growing. This will ensure that the plant receives the right balance of nutrients to thrive. Different fertilisers are available for flowering and foliage house plants, whilst specialist fertilisers are available for orchids, cacti and bonsai.



## Conservatory plants



Plants grown in a conservatory tend to prefer a warm, humid atmosphere so will need regular watering as well as feeding. Potting compost quickly becomes depleted of nutrients so regular feeding is a must. Liquid feed will provide a quick pick-me-up but will need repeat applications throughout the growing season; an easier option is to use slow-release fertiliser sticks. Purpose made fertiliser should always be used, not general garden fertiliser. Special formulas with a high nitrogen content are available for foliage plants.

## Ideal for the job

### Miracle Gro

This is a general purpose plant food that is available in different forms suitable for container plants, house plants, outdoor plants and lawns. Check the label to make sure your plants are getting the right balance of nutrients when they need them.



### Liquafeed

A ready-to-use plant feeding system that makes feeding as easy as watering. There's no mixing and no measuring. Miracle-Gro All Purpose Plant Food automatically mixes with the water from your garden hose so plants receive the nutrients they need.



### **B&Q** you can do it

Learn more about home improvement and garden projects with the bestselling **you can do it** – the complete **B&Q** step-by-step book of home improvement. Only **£16.98**

A summary of this leaflet can be made available in Braille, large print and audio cassette. Please ask for details or email us at [diversity@b-and-q.co.uk](mailto:diversity@b-and-q.co.uk)

Every effort has been made to ensure the instructions given in this leaflet are accurate and will enable you to do the job safely and successfully. Please follow instructions carefully and seek expert advice in the event of difficulty.

**B&Q** plc. Hampshire, SO53 3YX  
Visit us at [www.diy.com](http://www.diy.com)

HOWT0088 ©2007 B&Q plc  
All information correct at time of going to print

You can do it... **B&Q**



# How to... FEED YOUR PLANTS - INDOOR AND OUT

### TOOLS

- watering can
- hand-held sprayer
- hand fork
- trowel
- fork

### MATERIALS

- bonemeal
- growing compost
- fertiliser - liquid and solid

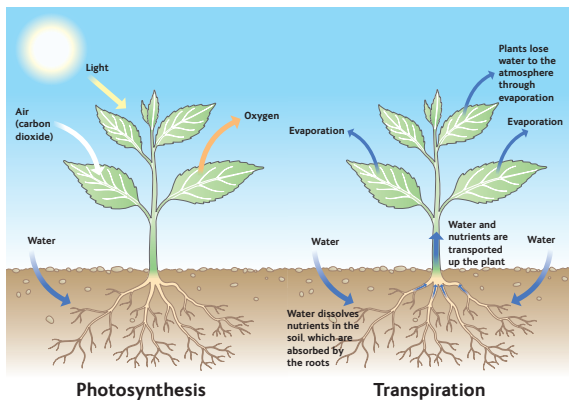
You can do it... **B&Q**

Plants need nutrients, air, water and sunlight to grow. Nutrients dissolved in water are absorbed from the soil by the plant's roots and transported around the plant – water is therefore a vital component when considering feeding plants.

## Vital nutrients for plant growth

The basic elements of a plant's diet are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium - known by their chemical symbols NPK. These are all present to a greater or lesser extent in ordinary garden soil. Nitrogen encourages leaves to grow, phosphorus promotes root growth, while potassium is essential for producing flowers and fruits.

These nutrients are required by all plants in varying amounts and plants will only take in the amount they require - so long as it is available. By topping up supplies of essential nutrients in the soil, we give a plant the chance to absorb the optimum amount, promoting strong, healthy growth and plentiful flowers and fruits.



## Other nutrients

Plants also require smaller amounts of minerals such as calcium, sulphur, iron, magnesium, copper and zinc.

Minerals such as magnesium and iron are usually in adequate supply for most plants, but there are some exceptions: tomatoes in particular can suffer from a lack of magnesium; acid-loving plants planted in an alkaline soil will suffer from a lack of iron.

## What is plant food?

Plant food or fertiliser is applied in liquid (concentrated or soluble) or solid (granular or pelleted) form, either organic or inorganic. There are many kinds of fertiliser available, but they all contain varying amounts of the essential elements nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium.

### Liquid fertiliser

Liquid fertilisers are available as a concentrate which is diluted in water or as a powder which is dissolved in water. A liquid fertiliser works within a few days of application because plants absorb their nutrients in liquid form. It gives actively growing plants a quick boost but does need to be applied regularly as it doesn't remain in the soil for very long.

### Solid fertiliser

Solid fertilisers are available in granular or pelleted form.

A solid fertiliser is better for sustained growth as it releases nutrients more slowly and so remains effective for longer. Consequently solid fertilisers usually only need to be applied once or twice in a season.

### When to apply fertiliser

General-purpose granular fertiliser should be applied in the spring, at the start of the growing season. Some kinds, such as bonemeal which encourages root growth, should be worked into the soil when planting in spring or autumn. You can also give vegetables a boost in summer by digging granular fertiliser in to the soil around the plants. Avoid using granular fertilisers, particularly ones high in nitrogen, after mid-summer - nitrogen promotes leaf growth and a fresh flush of growth in late summer may be vulnerable to damage by early frosts. Apply granular fertilisers only when the soil is moist.

Liquid fertilisers can be applied during the spring and summer particularly to boost flowering plants and fruit and vegetables.

### Green manures

A green manure is a crop that is dug straight back into the soil to enrich it. Usually from the legume family (especially bean or pea plants), these have the ability to 'fix' nitrogen in the soil. This is not the case with most plants: grass clippings or weeds for example, require copious amounts of nitrogen in order to rot down, and will take this from the soil if they are dug in. Many plants used as green manures store nitrogen in nodules on their roots, which is released back in to the soil when they decompose.

### choosing fertiliser

General-purpose fertiliser	This contains similar amounts of the three main plant nutrients and often includes trace elements. It is ideal for preparing soil for planting as well as general feeding. Growmore (inorganic) and blood, fish and bone (organic) are two which are often used.
Straight fertiliser	These target specific nutrient deficiencies, such as a lack of magnesium in tomatoes.

## Feeding outdoor plants

Keeping outdoor plants well fed will help them to be strong and withstand weeds, pests and diseases. Well fed flowering plants will produce more flowers for longer, while fruit and vegetable plants will give a higher yield of better quality. To get the best results, it is important to feed each plant with the nutrients it needs, when it needs them. Some common outdoor plants are featured here:

### Roses

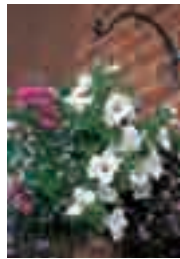
Always use a rose specific fertiliser to keep plants strong and healthy and better able to cope with pests and diseases.

### Bulbs

Most bulbs pop up year after year and the bulb itself acts as an energy store to support the next year's flowers. Feeding the bulb immediately after flowering and before the leaves die back will help to ensure a bumper show of flowers the following year.

### Plants in hanging baskets and containers

As well as daily watering, feeding hanging baskets and containers is extremely important – most only contain a small amount of compost relative to the amount of plant growth they support, and nutrients will quickly become depleted. Slow-release fertilisers in granular, stick or nugget form are all fantastic for long term planting. For seasonal bedding plants regular liquid feeding will give the best results.



### Tomatoes

Use a specific tomato plant feed once the first fruits have formed.



### Lawns

Fertiliser is vital for keeping a lawn lush and green. Lawns should be fed in spring and autumn when the soil is moist. The spring feed should be high in nitrogen to kick-start the growth of lush new grass, whereas the autumn feed should be high in phosphorus and potassium to toughen the grass up for the winter. Many lawn feed products combine lawn fertiliser with weedkiller. They are applied in exactly the same way and the advantage is that well-fed grass will grow more vigorously to fill gaps where the weeds have died back.

