



Welcome to Ground Work

Winterizing Perennials

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All perennial crops have two things in common:

- First, how well they go into dormancy has a direct effect on how well they come out of dormancy, and ultimately on how well they yield.
- Also, how well or how poorly they break dormancy depends on how efficient and to what extent the plants were able to store energy and minerals.

During this decade of droughts it becomes much more important, come late summer, to be aware of the nutritional status of your perennial crop. Crops in drought affected regions do not store away adequate reserves of energy because their growing season is shortened. The following spring they manifest this condition by slow growth, reduced fruit set and the like.

Yet you do have an opportunity to avoid that on dryland perennials if you have some late season moisture, a little bit of growing weather (such as an Indian Summer), and if you foliar fertilize. Other forms of fertilization may help for grasses, if you have time, but will do little for woody perennials.

Minerals in a given season for a tree crop like apples or blueberries come from what those plants have stored in their above ground tissues. In a tough year their roots don't take up enough minerals to replace those that were in the wood and moved to the harvested fruit.

Though not as pronounced, this same process holds true for crops like alfalfa, herbaceous perennials, and cool season grasses. Not as pronounced because come spring the nutrients don't have as far to go after root uptake, but just as vital because a slow start on these (or any crop for that matter) cuts into yield big.

And don't forget about warm season forages. These crops go into dormancy way sooner than cool season grasses and the same principals apply, but with one big difference. Warm season bunch grasses like bluestem and bahai store a lot of their reserves in their leaves so mowing or grazing them tight to the ground is uniquely hard on them. Yet in a drought tight grazing is what many of us have been obliged to do. So if you get any chance before they go dormant, get a little nutrition delivered to them so you can partly avoid a major growth slump next spring.

Applying pre-dormancy foliar fertilization can be a hard decision to make after a dry year. But if you can cash flow it, and you have decent growing conditions late, it is very justifiable.

The thing to remember is that fall fertilization is the first application for next year's crop. Often it is the most important application.

Whether you grow apples, raspberries, alfalfa or grass, your next crop depends hugely on how well those plants go into dormancy. **Targeted foliar fertilization prior to dormancy is the most effective, efficient, and timely way to get your next crop off to a good start.**