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## FERTILISERS

Gardeners starting off their gardening activities in the spring are likely to have a rude shock when they come to purchase fertilisers for the new season. It was only a couple of years back when you could buy a couple of 10kg bags of General Garden fertiliser for about \$18.00 now on the current price at the time of writing; one 10kg bag is going to cost you about \$18.00. To make matters worse, with the way fertilisers prices are increasing, on nearly a weekly bases, in the spring it would not surprise me, that the same 10kg maybe between \$25 to \$30.00 a bag.

I recently spoke to a supplier of Agri-chem Fertilisers for the commercial market and he told me that one particular type of fertiliser was costing \$300.00 a ton a few months ago. Then 6 weeks ago the same ton when up to \$600.00 a ton and in the last few days has reached \$1200.00 a ton.

Fertiliser companies such as Balance and Ravensdown are into the situation where they cannot quote ton prices on various fertilisers until they are landed and the costs tallied up.

Commercial users such as farmers, agriculturists and horticulturists who have been able to, have brought up and stock piled their most commonly used fertilisers, to obtain the best price for now.

What has caused this rapid increase in prices and the continual upward movement of prices?

There are many factors, one of which is the most obvious, it is the cost of transport and the escalating oil prices. This not only affects the price indirectly, but also the by-products of the oil industry which some fertilisers come into this area.

China, who up to recently was a major supplier to the world market with a range of fertilisers has placed a 135% tax on any fertilisers being exported out of China. (Till recently the tax was only 35%)

The reason is; China does not want their fertilisers being exported as they need them for food production in China.

We all know now that there is a critical world shortage of basic foods such as rice, wheat, corn, etc.

Reasons being two fold; populations in both China and India and other Asian countries are changing their diets for a more western one, making shortages of these basic food lines.

Land which was used to produce food crops has been switched to the new Bio-Fuel plantations making a further great shortfall.

There is an urgent need for the world to double its food production to assist those countries where people are already starving, but with the costs of fertilisers, transport, oil etc, escalating rapidly, it leaves the big question as to whether the poorer countries can actually afford the food produced.

Are we affected in New Zealand? The answer has to be yes as we go down to the Supermarket to buy our weekly groceries which are going to become dearer and dearer. Not only that we are now paying double the cost of filling the car to actually go to the Supermarket, go to work and do other activities.

Talk about the world prices spinning out of control.

Talking recently to a garden centre owner about the rapidly rising cost of fertilisers, they brought up further interesting points as to the cost of plants, seedlings etc which

will also be on the rise as growers add on the additional costs of production and transport.

It is time that we as gardeners became more self-sufficient in our gardening and food production methods. If we raise say a lettuce using cheap animal manures and kitchen wastes as the food for the plant and allow that lettuce to go to seed, we can collect enough seed to produce hundreds of lettuces.

It costs you a few seconds of your time to walk down to the garden plot and harvest a fresh lettuce that is full of nutritional value. Seed can be stored for a couple of seasons, but of each of the vegetables that you like to grow and consume, it is better to collect fresh seed each year by letting one of the crop go to seed. Over a period of time by doing this, you will create a strain of seed from that plant that will be perfectly adapted to your gardening conditions.

Your costs are minimal and by composting and collecting animal manure from farms or buying sheep manure pellets you will be putting much of the nutrient back into the soil needed by the plants growing there. Visit a local poultry farm and obtain some bags of chicken manure which can either be added as is, to the compost heap, to enrich it or laid as a mulch across the garden. Even better place a quantity of the manure in a tub with water and after stirring it occasionally you can take off some of the manure rich water, dilute it 10 parts of water to 1 part of manure water and spray that over soil and plants.

If applying directly to the soil and not the plant's foliage you can either use it straight or dilute it 1 to 1.

Using natural products will build up the humus levels of your soil and make for better gardening and healthier plants.

As opposed to this, the now expensive fertilisers directly feed the plants and harm the soil life along with the worms.

Another interesting point with man made fertilisers is that only a small percentage of the fertiliser is used by plants, somewhere around 20%, the rest will lock up in the soil till it leaches away contaminating our water supplies and oceans.

Small amounts of man made fertilisers can be an advantage as long as they are used at the right time to give a boost of growth when needed. The word is, Small Amounts which can equate to about a teaspoon or tablespoon full dependant on plant and needs. You can also obtain the best results of these small amounts by drenching them in with **Magic Botanic Liquid (MBL)** which aids in the uptake by the plant and reduces the lock-up effect that happens in the soil.

Add to the **MBL** some **Mycorrein** which is both a natural food for the plants and a prime food for the soil life and you reduce the damage that the fertilisers do.

Obtain a worm farm so you can convert your kitchen wastes to vermicast and worm pee. This not only provides you with most of the best nutrients for the gardens but also reduces the amount of rubbish you send to a landfill and makes you more self sufficient.

Alternatively purchase a few chickens, build a hen house with a run, for throwing your kitchen scraps and weeds along with a bit of chicken food. You will obtain great eggs, far better than purchased ones along with a regular supply of great manure for your gardens.

If you are near a beach collect seaweed and put that either onto your gardens as a mulch or into a drum with water.

Autumn gives us a bounty of leaves from deciduous trees which are ideal for composting, used as a mulch or stuffed into black plastic bags, tied off, and numerous small holes punched into the bags.

Left like this, in a sunny spot, they will turn to a rich leaf mould over the ensuing months.

Grow as much as you can of the vegetables that you eat, in either open ground or in containers so you can save money and have a healthier diet.

Maybe we need to seriously start doing much of the above to survive over the next period of time.

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