

# FERTILIZER LABELING NEEDS ACCURACY

One of my pet peeves has to do with fertilizer. There are lots of different nutrient analyses around and some use different nitrogen sources. That's not the problem.

The language on the front of the bags is what concerns me. Words such as organic, long-lasting, non-leaching, slow release or controlled release may be misleading.

There are nitrogen materials that have these characteristics, but just how much of the more expensive and usually more desirable forms of nitrogen must be put into a bag before it can be labeled with one of those words? Is it fair to use "slowly soluble," for instance, if only 1 percent of the nitrogen actually meets the criteria?

How about some company that has 50 percent slow release nitrogen in its bag? That's a much better turf fertilizer than one with only 1 percent slowly soluble nitrogen. Do they both get to use the same wording on the bag?

If the public reads and understands the guaranteed analysis on the back of the bag, folks would know how different the two fertilizers actually are.

Many states have fertilizer laws that dictate that the material must have at least half of its nitrogen in a slow or controlled release form to be called a lawn or turf fertilizer and use words such as slow release, non-leaching, etc., on the bag.

Such laws prevent inexpensive soluble fertilizers from being sold as slow release. Not all fertilizers should be used on lawns. With the current movement toward producing slower leaf growth rates, fertilizers that are slowly soluble or controlled release should be clearly identified to the public.

Another concern about fertilizer is the claim that a product is organically grown. An "organic anything" simply contains carbon. Inorganic chemicals do not contain carbon.

Some fertilizers claim to be organic, and, I think, use the term to suggest that the material is slowly available, non-leaching, non-burning and long lasting. It may indeed be all of these, or it may be none.

Depending on specific state fertilizer laws, the word organic on the bag does not necessarily mean all the nitrogen is from an organic source. Only a check of the analysis (listed on the back of the bag) will indicate the percentage of organic matter.

Not all organic nitrogen is slowly soluble, either. Urea is organic and also fairly soluble. In fact, urea is synthesized from ammonia and carbon dioxide. It has a salt index much higher than natural organics.

My biggest problem with the claim that organically fed plants are better is simply that plants can use nutrients only in their inorganic forms. For plants to use nutrients contained in organic chemicals, those chemicals must first be converted from an organic form to an inorganic by microorganisms in the soil.

Inorganic chemicals are just as natural as organics and are mostly derived from parent material, the stuff the earth is made from.

What could be more natural than that?

Credit: Bill Knoop is Extension Turfgrass Specialist, Texas A&M University. Article seen in Divots, May 1992.

# G C S A A ANNOUNCES TRADE SHOW CAMERA POLICY

The Board of Directors for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) has determined that photography on their trade show floors will be restricted in 1993.

Beginning with GCSAA's International Golf Course Conference and Show in Anaheim, CA. on January 23-30, only photographers wearing GCSAA-issued armbands will be permitted to take still or video cameras on the show floor.

"At the request of our Industrial Advisory Council (IAC), the board felt that this was the best course of action," said GCSAA President William R. Roberts, CGCS. "There was a need to assist the manufacturers and protect the proprietary nature of their products." GCSAA's IAC is comprised of 14 exhibitor companies.

Only photographers with journalistic-or publicity-related responsibilities will be eligible for a GCSAA photo armband. The new photography regulations also require a photographer to receive verbal approval from the supervising exhibitor at the booth before photographing an exhibitor's booth or display.

The new camera regulations for both GCSAA conference and trade shows will be mailed later in the fall. For more information, contact GCSAA Public Relations at 913-832-4470.

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