

Nutrient pellets feed container stock

Controlled release plant nutrition in the form of egg-shaped pellets might be a valuable tool for nurserymen in keeping container stock healthy and vigorous for long periods of time. One company, Estech, Inc., will soon introduce a 6-gram "briquette" to complement its established 16-gram Woodace pellet.

Research conducted at the Burden Research Center, near Baton Rouge, LA, by Director Dr. Warren Meadows and Don Fuller, a research associate, suggests smaller packaged briquette formulations could have advantages nurserymen might want to consider. But are they effective?

Yes, say the researchers.

Nurserymen who use fertilizer briquettes correctly can maintain the vigor of stock long after it is moved into wholesale channels and even several months beyond.

The root system of the containerized plant surrounds the briquettes, and the matrix—the coating which surrounds the actual plant food—maintains a desirable rate of release for use by the plant.

The Woodace briquettes contain IBDU as the source of nitrogen. IBDU is known for slow release by soil hydrolysis; the product does not require soil bacterial action to release.

High temperatures do not appreciably increase the rate of nitrogen release and cold weather slows release only slightly and where needed. Plants have the opportunity to harden off.

The researchers note the smaller-sized pellets provide more surface area (in relation to their size) and a



New 6-gram briquettes.

higher release pattern.

And they are handy. Application using a dibble is made only once during the growing season.

Error is minimized because workers are given a number of briquettes to add to each container—as opposed to having to measure a specific amount. Also, no topdressing is needed as is common, usually on a monthly basis.

Also, briquettes are not subject to leaching. Container plants normally get 1/2 inch of water daily and a quick release nitrogen will readily leach, with loss to the owner.

Although the studies concentrated on the use of briquette plant nutrition for container stock in 1 and 3-gallon containers, preliminary trials indicate excellent potential for the 5, 10, 20, 30, and 50 gallon containers also. The research center recently began formal studies on these larger sizes. Greater periods of control release plant feed-

ing may be possible.

"I think their (briquettes) potential is going to be in the larger containers because of the long release factor," says research associate Fuller. "There might be some potential in using the briquettes on outside landscape material also."

But Fuller feels acceptance of the briquettes will ultimately be determined by commercial cost effectiveness.

Researchers feel they can take most any fertilizer material on the market today and adapt it to use on woody ornamentals. But each material has a prescribed use determining both amount and frequency of application. A grower finds what best fits his own operation.

Nurserymen may be using more of the controlled release, briquette form of nutrition to provide healthy and attractive stock months beyond the nursery itself, a better situation for grower and dealer. Fuller says it's not uncommon for retailers to get plants and not know how to handle them until they show symptoms of being nutritionally starved.



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