

It looks like a Sweet Green summer

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I had a fun conversation at a dinner party hosted by my wife's business the other night. A few guests at my table knew what I do for a living, and several did not.

One fella familiar with GardenLine thanked me for introducing him to Nitro-Phos Sweet Green and profusely complemented the product. Those who didn't know anything about GardenLine had their interest piqued, and from that point on the questions just kept coming. But the first dozen or so were all about Sweet Green.

Well, since it's time to apply our summer fertilizer per my lawn schedules, I think it's worth revisiting the basics of one of my favorite organic lawn fertilizers for the Gulf Coast — technically Nitro-Phos Sweet Green 11-0-4. I regard this product so highly because I consider it a true game-changer in lawn fertilizers.



Now, if you've been having success with *any* fertilizer on my regular or organic schedules, I'm not here to fix what ain't broke. Just keep on dancin' with the one what brung ya. (If you're unfamiliar with southern euphemisms, I'm good with sticking with what you're successful and comfortable.) All I ask is that you stay true to the schedule.

Meanwhile, if your interest is also piqued about Sweet Green, here's what I told my table partners. In the 20 years I've been doing GardenLine, no organic fertilizer had ever met all three of the criteria needed to garner my total endorsement, until Sweet Green came along about four years ago. I have long okayed many organic fertilizers that meet *two* of the three requirements. But I will never endorse one that fails two or more:

1. It can't smell bad. Although exceptional in fertilizing abilities, most poultry-based (chicken poop) organic fertilizers smell to high heaven. The odor will gag the average person. I know it makes me sick, so I stay away.
2. It has to be compatible with typical broadcast spreaders. I can name at least a half-dozen manufacturers that have, over the years, pitched products that looked like extruded rabbit food (and in some cases, rabbit poop). Those could never be dispersed in a broadcast spreader. And many "chicken poop" varieties, while spreadable, leave a mess.

3. It needs to be cost-effective. Years ago, several entrepreneurial con artists thought they could overcharge for their "first true organic fertilizer" and, at one point, being the only game in Houston. Thankfully, most of them no longer exist, although their pricing scheme still does - some organic fertilizers cost \$25-\$30 for a bag that covers only about 1,500 square feet. There are many good organics on the market at roughly \$30 per bag covering around 3,500 square feet. While that's much better, a \$30 bag of Sweet Green covers nearly 5,000! Now, I wasn't a math major at Texas A&M, but it doesn't take a PhD to figure out which is the better deal.

So, if you've been paying attention, you have deduced that Sweet Green doesn't have a bad smell. In fact, it has a rather "sweet" aroma. I liken it to a combination of coffee and molasses. Actually, it is derived from molasses and sugar beets.

It also has the highest nitrogen content (the "11" in 11-0-4) of any true organic fertilizer available. Previously, 8-2-4 was the highest among all-purposes fertilizers. There are some 9-0-0 organics, but that's nothing *but* nitrogen, which I couldn't recommend for my fertilization schedule.

Also, because Sweet Green is produced in uniform fertilizer prills, it is one of the easiest organic fertilizers to spread. And it doesn't generate a putrid cloud or leave a sticky, dusty film in the broadcast spreader.

So, you may be asking, "Do I use it instead of the regular 3-1-2 fertilizers you've always recommended for the summer? Yes! No! Maybe so!!! Does that clear it up for you?"

Seriously, if you've been successfully using Nitro-Phos Super Turf 19-4-10, Easy-Gro Premium 19-5-9, Fertilome Southwest Greenmaker 18-0-6, or whatever, you can continue. I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel. However, if this is the year you've decided to go a little more organic, Sweet Green is the best first step. And for the summer fertilization per my schedule, going organic is a no-brainer for those worried about burning the yard with a synthetic in our heat. That won't happen anyway, but I don't have space here to get into that.

Actually, I think synthetics and organics are completely interchangeable in either fertilization schedule ... even as the winterizer. Yes, that means you can mix and match. For example, you can apply Sweet Green now and go back to a synthetic winterizer in a few months. Or do your synthetic this summer and use Sweet Green for your fall feeding. That flexibility is one of the beauties of this still fairly new product. There's just one big no-no: Don't mix the two during the same application. Choose one or the other for each specific application.

I realize some gardening retailers don't sell Nitro-Phos products, and it's not available at mass merchandisers or big-box stores that have garden centers. But it *is* in stock at any nursery, garden center, feed store or hardware store that has historically carried Nitro-

Phos products. If you find a nursery, garden center, feed store or hardware store that generally has Nitro-Phos stuff but doesn't have Sweet Green in stock, ask them to order it for you. Some locations may simply be out, but asking for it will get it back on their shelves in a matter of days.

Finally, let me emphasize that Nitro-Phos Sweet Green 11-0-4 is mostly for lawns. While it can be used for trees and shrubs, it is not a fertilizer for vegetable or herb gardens, fruit trees or flowering plants that need significantly more balance and, in some cases, far more phosphorous (the middle number in the ratio).

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