



FYN Garden Q & A Series

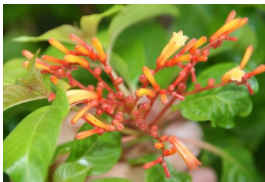
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Yards & Neighborhoods



FYN Topic: Firebush Fertilization

Question: What type of fertilizer should I use on my firebush? When and how much? I live in Lehigh Acres. — Jo V.

Answer: A good Florida-friendly landscaping shrub like firebush (*Hamelia patens*) requires minimal water or fertilizer to maintain and keep healthy. A Florida-native, Firebush has striking clusters of reddish-orange flowers and pearl-like, red & black fruit attractive to wildlife. Expect to see plenty of birds, hummingbirds and butterflies right now. Left to grow natural without a lot of pruning, Firebush grows rapidly in the heat of summer. Even in natural surroundings like a wet forest floor or swamp, firebush will regularly drop older leaves. Their dead leaves decompose rapidly, eventually becoming compost and plant food for the forest floor. Firebush growing in landscaped beds also show little benefit from any added fertilizer. For butterfly gardens where many firebush are planted, only a single fertilizer application of organic compost, mulch and/or 8-8-8 fertilizer in the Spring is warranted. When fertilizing, follow county guidelines. Learn more at: <http://fertilizesmart.com>. Since nutritional problems are rare on firebush, what else could be going on? In Lehigh Acres, firebush might exhibit thinning, leaf wilt and poor growth caused by three other problems: too much shade, cold damage and improper transplanting. All three problems mimic symptoms showing a lack of nutrition. Lehigh Acres is considered marginal for raising firebush. Cold damage is exhibited at temperatures below 40 °F. One positive note is cooler weather forces firebush to show its fall colored leaves of red, yellow and dark grayish purple. On over-pruned or cold-damaged firebush in the spring, expect a slower than normal recovery. Even if newly planted, firebush prefer supplemental water from irrigation. Finally, keep your plants mulched throughout the year with a 3" layer of recycled, organic mulch like Melaleuca or pine straw. Apply the mulch once or twice a year to keep soil moisture constant or to add well decom-



Useful Links

<http://www.floridayards.org>

<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu>

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>

<http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml> Firebush

Thomas Becker is an extension agent for the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods (FYN) program at the Lee County Extension Service. Submit questions by calling the Horticulture Help Desk at 533-7504 between 9 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. or by emailing Extgardener@leegov.com. Visit his Web page at <http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/FYN/FYNHome.shtml>

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