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Fertiliser Sausages and Tree Pastes

Fertiliser Sausages

Fertiliser sausages are the term I have coined for a fertilising method I use that recycles natural fibres and provides a slow release source of nutrients for my fruiting trees and vines.

I started to trial this method around four years ago because:

- I needed to provide a slow release form of nutrients for one lemon tree growing in a small sloping bed. Nutrients spread around the drip-line washed away too quickly because of the slope.
- Making a sausage helped to hold the mulch in place on sloping sites during the drought.
- I was already recycling old cotton fabric (towels, sheets, curtains) as a method of weed control and covering them under a layer of mulch. I was astounded at how quickly and completely the cotton fabric disappeared.
- Many gardeners find fertilising their fruit tree four times each year too labour intensive and their trees suffer as a result. With fertiliser sausages nutrients need to be applied less frequently.

I am now convinced that this method can work well for other gardeners.

To make a fertiliser sausage you will need:

- Material made from natural fibre (cotton towels, woollen blankets, cotton sheets, curtains, tablecloths, jeans etc).
- A variety of animal manures (cow, sheep, alpaca, fowl manure mixed with sawdust litter)
- Pelleted manure and/or blood and bone
- Trace elements or rock dust
- Other natural nutrients like compost, worm castings, powdered seaweed.

Wrap a diverse mix of ingredients in the fabric to make a sausage. Wet fabric works best as it seems to hold the material together better and is easier to wrap. Roll the sausage over several times so as to encase the organic matter and fertiliser with several layers of fabric. Tie the ends of the sausage with natural fibre (wool, hemp twine, natural string).



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Lay one or more sausages around the drip line of the tree and cover with mulch. As you water or when it rains the liquid nutrients drip down into the root zone.

Why apply fertiliser sausages?

- You can get away with fertilising less often and this is often a helpful strategy for time poor (or forgetful) gardeners.
- It is a good way of recycling natural fibre that is past being suitable for the lifeline bin.

How long does the sausage last?

- This varies depending on the thickness of the sausage, the material you use and the biological life in your soil. My sausages almost completely disappear with six to eight months.

When can you apply sausages?

- Any time you like, but especially after you prune your trees.

What can you apply sausages to?

It is very successful on fruiting trees and vines, but I am going to try it on roses this year. Anything that needs high levels of nutrition throughout the year should benefit.

Tree Pastes

Biodynamic growers (who follow the teaching of philosopher, Rudolf Steiner) have long advocated the application of tree pastes.

Biodynamic farmers and gardeners apply tree pastes during winter in order to:

- feed the tree
- protect the bark
- seal cracks and crevices in the bark that can harbour diseases and pests

My main aim in experimenting with trees pastes over the past four years came about primarily as a result of:

- persistent attack from and difficulty in eradicating white louse scale on citrus (see image)
- borer attack on citrus

Both these conditions were brought about by drought stress. Lack of water had made the trees more susceptible to scale and borers.

Most gardeners know if you spray the trunk of a tree with Roundup the bark can absorb the chemical and the tree will die. If the tree bark can absorb roundup, I believe that it can absorb nutrients.



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I have been experimenting with trees paste applications for four years and the results that I am getting with my trees have convinced me they are worthwhile.

At this point I would like to acknowledge my friend and fellow tree paste enthusiast from Brisbane Organic Growers, Phil Ryan. Phil and I have been comparing mixtures and results and Phil now makes and sells trees pastes. You will find his paste available at stand ? in the kitchen garden area.

But I am also going to show you how to make your own tree paste.

To make a tree paste you need:

Cow manure (preferably not processed, not fresh (steaming) but real cow manure). The cow manure feeds the plant, contains beneficial biological life and binds the paste together. (Measure out four parts)

Insecticide grade diatomaceous earth (not swimming pool type because this is heat treated and quite dangerous).

This is a desiccant or drying agent. It is a mined product composed of diatoms. Diatoms have microscopically sharp edges that act like sandpaper. They wear away at the exoskeleton of any insect. Any insect that comes in contact with the diatomaceous earth is dehydrated. (Measure out two parts)

Clay or bentonite

The clay helps to make the paste stick and fills in the cracks and crevices. It helps it set so that the paste stays stuck to the trunk for around six months. (Measure out three parts)

To make the paste mix I add **liquid seaweed** and **rain water**. If I am using it fresh I also sometimes add molasses as a source of additional nutrients.

Some people add other ingredients like blood and bone or wood ash. When I make a mixture adding these ingredients the dog eats it!

How do you apply tree pastes?

- To apply, use a scrubbing brush to remove any loose bark. Make the paste into a sloppy mixture and apply by hand or with a brush. (Demonstrate on a branch).

What can tree pastes be applied to?

- Any fruit trees, ornamental trees, roses or anything else that has a brown trunk. Avoid applying to very young trees or green wood as it can burn.

When can tree pastes be applied?

- During winter as a means of feeding your plants and reducing the incidence of pest outbreaks in spring.



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- Whenever you prune a tree to prevent sunburn of the limbs due to the reduced foliage canopy.
- Where outbreaks of borers or scale are a persistent problem.

How long do tree pastes last and how often do they need to be reapplied?

- Tree pastes generally last at least six months and can be applied once each year to feed the tree or twice yearly for borer prevention.

In conclusion

The great thing about gardeners is that they are generally open to trying something before science says explains how it works.

Tree pastes and fertiliser sausages are probably not for everybody, but they work for me. Give them a go and you might find that they work for you too!

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