



Tending the Garden: Foliar Feeding

Just like any living thing, plants get hungry. And it's usually about this time in the season that they could use a snack.

The most effective long-term solution for feeding your garden plants is by building the soil. Adding organic matter, rich compost, and amendments that your soil specifically needs contributes to the overall health of the garden. Fertile soil provides the nutrition that plants need for the growing season. We liken the soil and all the nutrition that it holds to a meal for the plants in the garden.

If your garden soil is a work in progress, or if your plants seem to be having a difficult time accessing nutrients that they need (Is the pH too high or low? Is the ground saturated with water?), they may need a boost of nutrition. You'll know if your plants need some food if their leaves are yellowish, if their growth has slowed significantly, or if they aren't producing very much.

The quickest way to address a nutrient deficiency is through foliar feeding. By spraying a fertilizer on the leaves of the plant, we provide nutrition that the plant can access immediately. Though it sounds somewhat unlikely, this is a proven method for getting nutrition to plants quickly. A foliar feeding provides a much-needed snack, if the plants aren't accessing enough food from their "meal," the soil.



These cherry and slicing tomatoes at the Grow Pittsburgh managed Frick Greenhouse are loving their bi-weekly snacks!
We foliar feed with seaweed, fish emulsion, and Epsom salts.

We foliar feed plants at our production sites on a regular basis, with great results. Wanna try it at home? Here's how:

- Plan to foliar feed on a cloudy day – or in the morning before the sun is too direct. The plants access more nutrients if the foliar feed stays on the leaves longer.
- Choose an organic fertilizer (we like a combination of seaweed and fish emulsion) and mix it up according to the directions. Mix well to get rid of any clumps.
- Pour into a sprayer. Handheld sprayers are available at home improvement stores for about \$5.
- Spray the plants thoroughly, trying to reach all the leaves.
- Repeat every 2 weeks, or as needed.

Tips:

- Use all the foliar feed in one spraying - don't save it for later, as it will mold. If you have extra, water your plants with it.
- Be aware that organic fertilizers are often stinky. Harvest before you spray, and don't spray right before you have visitors!
- Add a tablespoon or two of Epsom salts/quart of water. This is especially effective for tomatoes.



Another view of the well-fed greenhouse tomatoes.