

## Features

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## Feeding Frenzy

*Ellen C. Wells*

### Plant Foods

The Espoma Company has been producing natural and organic plant foods for more than 80 years. Over that time, they've added to their offerings a number of products that are plant specific. **Tomato-tone (3-4-6)** addresses the one tomato-growing problem that confounds tomato gardeners the most: blossom end rot. It does this with a formulation that contains 8% calcium. In addition, Tomato-Tone is specifically formulated to help gardeners be successful by producing consistently plump and juicy fruits.

**Holly-tone (4-3-4)** is an industry icon when it comes to plant-specific formulations. Created specifically for acid-loving plants such as hollies, azaleas, rhododendrons, dogwoods and evergreens, in 4-, 8- and 20-lb. bags. **Bulb-tone (3-5-3)** reminds gardeners that bulbs need food, too. Containing bone meal and other natural organics, Bulb-tone gives all types of bulbs a complete and balanced feeding. All of these products are available in 4- and 20-lb. bags. For more information on their other plant-specific foods, visit [www.espoma.com](http://www.espoma.com).

Two products from Scotts Miracle-Gro are formulated specifically for the benefit of roses. **Miracle-Gro Shake 'n Feed Continuous Release Rose Plant Food (9-18-9)** applies easily by shaking onto the soil's surface then working it into the soil's top few inches. Watering will activate the feeding process, which will continue to feed the plant for up to three months. This product is not intended for use on roses in containers. Available in jugs and bags. The second product is **Miracle-Gro Water Soluble Rose Plant Food**, available in both Garden Feeder (premeasured feeder refill packet) and 1.5- or 5-lb. box form. The water-soluble food is easy for gardeners to understand and apply on a consistent basis, giving them more time to devote to pruning and enjoying their blooms. [www.scotts.com/smg](http://www.scotts.com/smg).

Once a supplier of bougainvillea in the U.S. Southeast, BGI-USA now exclusively offers plant-specific foods for many of the plants that thrive in that region. **Bougain (6-8-10)** is specifically for feeding bougainvillea plants. Bougain increases the number and the vibrancy of the plants' flowers while strengthening the root system, long a trouble point in this plant's growth. Iron, magnesium and manganese contained within Bougain also boost the plant's performance. **Palmgain (8-2-12)** for palms, ferns, cycads, ixora and ornamental plants is the recommended formulation to produce deep green foliage and healthy roots. It also contains small amounts of sulfur, magnesium and iron. **Hibisgain (12-6-8)** is specially formulated for growing vibrantly

colored and strong hibiscus flowers with bold green leaves. This is also a good, all-around fertilizer.

**Citrusgain (8-3-9)** is for citrus and fruit plants needing ample amounts of nitrogen, potassium, magnesium, manganese, iron, copper, zinc, sulfur, and other macronutrients and micronutrients. This formulation produces high yields, good fruit size and high juice quality. All of these products are available in 2-, 10- and 50-lb. bags. [www.bgi-usa.com](http://www.bgi-usa.com).

Sun Gro Horticulture has several plant-specific foods. The **Black Gold Citrus, Avocado & Vine Fertilizer** is a blend of all-natural fertilizers for citrus, avocados, grapes and fruit trees. Its 7-3-3 ratio promotes both healthy growth and fruiting for specimens grown both in-ground as well as in containers. For the vegetable grower, there's the **Black Gold Tomato & Vegetable Fertilizer**, an OMRI-listed product for organic gardening. It contains both quick- and slow-release components and will feed for up to six months, allowing most gardeners to apply just once during the growing season. [www.sungro.com](http://www.sungro.com).

Compost “teas” are being seen more and more and are popular with the all-natural gardener. Authentic Haven Brand has developed a plant-specific tea, **Alfalfa for Roses Tea**, that provides gardeners with what has long been a “secret weapon” among rosarians—a naturally occurring chemical found in alfalfa that increases the number of blooms and number of basal breaks on rosebushes. This brew is the easy way to provide rosebushes with all the benefits that alfalfa naturally provides without having to mulch with alfalfa. [www.manuretea.com](http://www.manuretea.com).

Dr. Earth's **Organic 4 Acid Lovers Fertilizer (4-5-4)** fertilizer is suited for acid-loving plants such as camellias, maples, azaleas, hollies, gardenias, hydrangeas and more. The company's **Organic 9 Fruit Tree Fertilizer (7-4-2)** is formulated for fruit trees and berry bushes. Both are quick-release fertilizers and so are beneficial to the plants right away, but also continue to feed for many months. Both also contain ProBiotic, an infusion of beneficial soil microbes and mycorrhizae that naturally contribute to nutrient availability and increased plant performance. Available in 4-, 12-, 25- and 50-lb. bags. [www.drearth.net](http://www.drearth.net).

While not a food for a specific plant, **Nature's Source Plant Food** from Ball DPF Inc. itself is derived from plants, or more specifically, from oilseed extract, and is a renewable source of plant nutrition. The 10-4-3 formulation has low salts, which allows feeding at higher rates without harming plants. And it's concentrated, so a little goes a long way—giving the customer more value per container. Available in 16-oz., 32-oz. and 64-oz. bottles, and 32-oz. hose-end sprayer bottle. [www.NaturesSourcePlantFood.com](http://www.NaturesSourcePlantFood.com).

## Supplements and Additives

There are several products that, while not considered plant food specifically, do act to benefit plants when added to the soil. The Espoma Company's **Soil Acidifier** helps gardeners with that age-old trick of turning their pink hydrangeas blue. Soil Acidifier is a long-lasting, safe and non-toxic way to lower the hydrangea's soil pH in order for the magic to happen. Available in 6-lb. bags that are easy to cross-merchandise within a hydrangea display. [www.espoma.com](http://www.espoma.com).

**Actino-Iron** from Novozymes BioAg is a granular soil additive that combines the company's organic fungicide Actinovate with organic iron and humic acid. The three work together to control fungal pathogens and produce long-term greening of the plants, healthy roots and vigorous top growth. It can be used on vegetables, herbs, annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs. Available in 10-lb. bags and 9-oz. pouches. **GP**