

ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest. Email or mail your questions to:

info@sprigsandtwigs.net or

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Question #1 this Week: *Is it true that I can use beer as a fertilizer for my plants?...Karen*

Linda's Answer: Unfortunately, that's an old wives tale that may have started way back in the early 1800s. It sounds like it might be a good idea in theory (i.e., a good source of food (carbohydrates) for plants and microorganisms in the soil and minerals to promote better plant growth), but it doesn't work out that way. Beer doesn't help plants and, in fact, it can be detrimental.

Beer contains: Carbohydrates (sugar), protein, carbon dioxide, water, alcohol and other trace elements.

Carbohydrates: Plants can't take advantage of any added carbohydrates, but the microbes in the soil can. The carbs in beer, however, are the wrong kind to do any good. Beer has carbs called "simple sugars", but the beneficial microorganisms in the soil can only utilize complex carbohydrates.

Proteins: Protein includes nitrogen. On average, there's about 6 grams of protein per liter of beer (not very much!). It won't hurt, but the quantity is so small, it would be a waste of good beer.

Carbon dioxide: There is plenty already in the air; any added to the soil by adding beer won't have an impact on plant health.

Water: That's always a good thing!

Alcohol: That can be a very bad thing for plants. Several weeks ago, I wrote about using alcohol to deliberately stunt plant growth of paper whites, but in very carefully mixed doses. If you overdo it with too much alcohol, you can kill the plant!

Other trace elements: Iron, copper, zinc, etc. are in such small amounts, they won't do any good.

There is, however, a great use for beer, if you have slugs or snails in your garden damaging your plants. Bury a shallow dish in the ground with its lip even with the surface of the ground and put beer in it. Snails and slugs love the smell and they will dive in and won't be able to get out!

The bottom line – unless you are going after slug and snail control, beer in your garden may sound like a good idea, but it's not.



Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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