

Anyone Making Seawater Fertilizer?

by Al Chomica

In our garden we often fertilize our plants, yet we have not used a store-bought chemical fertilizer for several years now. We have found no reason to support Big Ag companies that produce chemicals from fossil fuels. All the things our plants need to thrive and grow can usually be sourced from natural, organic materials that are all around us. One of the easiest fertilizers to give your plants is something that contains all the elements the earth has in its periodic table. I'm talking about seawater. Fermented seawater too for that matter.

Not only does seawater contain all the elements including small amounts of that NPK component we usually seek but it contains all those trace elements that seem so important for plant-specific, and in some cases, livestock issues. Did you know the mineral selenium is not found on Vancouver Island? Without selenium in a mare's diet, her colt would be unable to stand up after it is born!

Ranchers end up buying expensive alfalfa bales from other parts of the world that do have selenium to stave this off but a much simpler solution could be to just provide the livestock with diluted seawater to drink. Years ago I bought an expensive pail of chemical micronutrients in attempts to provide my pear tree with boron. I could have just watered with diluted seawater to get the same results.

We use seawater daily to water all our plants. It is diluted at a ratio of 1 part seawater to 30 parts rain water. We never use tap water as the chlorine is very harmful to soil microbes. If you think about it, the reason tap water is chlorinated is to kill off microbes and bacteria, both good and bad; yet in gardening we try to promote the growth of microbes because they work in conjunction with our plants. In our big 45 gallon (200L) water barrel we pour in about six litres of seawater to obtain this ratio.

We collect seawater from a tidal pool across the road and only from the top 10cm layer to ensure the sample is also loaded with an incredible variety of microbes that are also very beneficial to the soil.

We generate NPK from various organic sources and, depending upon the plant's needs in the nutritive cycle, we can boost that particular element. In the spring when everything needs higher nitrogen I just beef up the seawater with a bit of home made fish fertilizer. For the phosphorus we char sunflower stalks, powder them and strain in water. If I want to induce flowering I will add something that is high in potassium, like wood ash tea, to the seawater. It is a simple system to adapt to and now after a year of using seawater on a regular basis I don't know how we ever grew anything before it came into our lives.

In some natural farming circles, seawater is used to break up hardpan clay soils. We are trying to reclaim an experimental plot in Errington that is both hardpan and horse-depleted land. Over the last year we have been applying diluted seawater along with various microbial solutions to try to bring life back into this soil. Last weekend a final soaking of fermented seawater was applied to a small section and it will be planted up in two weeks to see if things will now grow.

A future issue will discuss how to ferment this wonderful liquid to do even more things with it . . .

Website Editor's Note: See 2019-07-AC-Anyone Fermenting Seawater

