

ORGANIC Gardening™

■ Nutrient Deficiency Problem Solver



By Erika Jensen

If your plants look discolored, stunted, or have low yields, a nutrient deficiency might be the culprit. Many nutrients other than nitrogen, including calcium and phosphorus, play a vital role in plant growth. If your plant exhibits a deficiency symptom, make sure to get a soil test before you add any amendments.

Nutrient	Function	Deficiency symptoms	Source
Nitrogen	Required for all phases of growth and development	Lower leaves light green or yellowish; plant is stunted.	Blood meal, composted poultry manure, feather meal.
Phosphorus	Strengthens stems, helps in resistance to pests and diseases, fruiting and flowering	Lower leaves and stem are reddish; upper leaves are dull, pale; failure to flower or produce fruit.	Bone meal, colloidal or rock phosphate, fish meal
Potassium	Required for formation of all sugars, starches and proteins; contributes to cold-hardiness; root development.	Lower leaves spotted, mottled or curled; underdeveloped roots, stem tissue may appear weak	Composted manure, wood ashes, greensand, seaweed.
Calcium	Required for cell growth and division, helps plants use nitrogen	Tipburn on lettuce, blossom-end rot in pepper and tomatoes.	Bone meal, gypsum, lime.
Sulfur	Constituent of protein and certain vitamin complexes.	New leaves are yellowish.	Composted manure, gypsum, Sul-Po-Mag.
Magnesium	Constituent of chlorophyll; required for enzyme action.	Whitish patches appear first on older leaves, between leaf veins.	Sul-Po-Mag, Epsom salts