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Tree Pastes

Tree pastes are used as an aid to tree vigour and for pest and disease control. Biodynamic gardeners routinely use tree pastes during winter. The original formula proposed by biodynamics founder, Rudolf Steiner, was composed of:

- 4 parts cow manure (naturally aged, not processed products)
- 3 parts fine clay* or bentonite*.
- 2 parts diatomaceous earth* or silica sand

My own experiments centre on insecticide grade diatomaceous earth as the primary ingredient. I use pastes to prevent borer attack and control scale infestation on roses and citrus. It should be noted that insecticide grade diatomaceous earth is not the same as the heat treated and highly dangerous diatomaceous earth used in swimming pool filters.

My recipe is composed of:

- 1 part clay
- 1 part sheep manure
- 2 parts diatomaceous earth

Combine these ingredients and make into a paste by mixing it with seaweed extract diluted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

The clay and manure helps the paste stick and gives it an earthy colour and provides nutrients to the tree. The diatomaceous earth acts as a barrier to pests. Pastes are diluted with water until they reach the consistency of thick paint and work best when applied to thin barked trees and shrubs. Traditionally these pastes are used during winter, but I have found them to be successful at any time of year.

**Insecticide grade diatomaceous earth is available in domestic quantities from Green Harvest www.greenharvest.com*

Bentonite clay can be purchased from most produce stores, but is usually only available in large bags. I use potter's clay is available in small quantities from discount stores and craft suppliers.

Fertiliser Sausages

Fertiliser sausages are the term I have coined for a fertilising method I use that recycles natural fibres and provides a slow release source of nutrients for fruiting trees and vines (or any other plants).

I started to trial this method around four years ago because:

- I needed to provide a slow release form of nutrients for a lemon tree growing in a small sloping bed. Nutrients spread around the drip-line washed away too quickly because of the slope.
- Making a sausage helped to hold the mulch in place on sloping sites during the drought.



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- I was already recycling old cotton fabric (towels, sheets, curtains) as a method of weed control and covering them under a layer of mulch. I was astounded at how quickly and completely the cotton fabric disappeared.
- Many gardeners find fertilising their fruit tree three or four times each year too labour intensive and their trees suffer as a result. With fertiliser sausages nutrients need to be applied less frequently.

I am now convinced that this method can work well for other gardeners.

To make a fertiliser sausage you will need:

- Material made from natural fibre (cotton towels, woollen blankets, cotton sheets, curtains, tablecloths, jeans etc).
- A variety of animal manures (cow, sheep, alpaca, fowl manure mixed with sawdust litter)
- Pelleted manure and/or blood and bone
- Trace elements or rock dust
- Other natural nutrients like compost, worm castings, powdered seaweed.

Wrap a diverse mix of ingredients in the fabric to make a sausage. Wet fabric works best as it seems to hold the material together better and is easier to wrap. Roll the sausage over several times so as to encase the organic matter and fertiliser with several layers of fabric. Tie the ends of the sausage with natural fibre (wool, hemp twine, natural string).

Lay one or more sausages around the drip line of the tree and cover with mulch. As you water or when it rains the liquid nutrients drip down into the root zone.

Why apply fertiliser sausages?

- You can get away with fertilising less often and this is often a helpful strategy for time poor (or forgetful) gardeners.
- It is a good way of recycling natural fibre that is past being suitable for the lifeline bin.

How long does the sausage last?

- This varies depending on the thickness of the sausage, the material you use and the biological life in your soil. My sausages almost completely disappear with six to eight months.

When can you apply sausages?

- Any time you like, but especially after you prune your trees.

What can you apply sausages to?

It is very successful on fruiting trees and vines, but can be used on all plants.