

## **ASK THE AG TEAM, for the week of March 16, 2008**

Using wood ashes in the garden? –by *Tim Baker, Horticulture Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, Daviess County*

A question I am occasionally asked is if it is ok to use wood ashes in the garden. The homeowner typically has a fireplace or wood stove which produces a large amount of wood ashes each winter. This can become a disposal problem. Is it acceptable to put them on the garden?

I always answer that with a guarded “Yes.” Wood ashes can benefit your garden. But overuse will cause problems which are not easily corrected. Caution is in order.

First, the good news. If you have an acid soil, you may use some wood ashes without problems. Wood ashes are alkaline, and will raise your soil's pH. Some wood ashes have a neutralizing equivalent up to around half of that of limestone. Thus, if a soil test called for five pounds of limestone per 100 square feet, you could use around ten pounds of wood ashes to get the same effect. This is only an approximation.

If you use wood ashes regularly, you will want to keep a close eye on your soil's pH; you don't want to raise it too high. Once you get up to 6.5 pH, you may need to discontinue adding wood ashes until the pH starts to decline again.

And that's the bad news . . . you can actually apply too many wood ashes to your soil, and raise its pH to a level which is too high for most plants. Sometimes I get a soil test back with a very high pH level. The first question I ask is, “Did you apply wood ashes?” Quite often, they have. If it's too high, they may have to apply sulfur to bring the pH back down to an acceptable level.

Wood ashes do contain some nutrient value. So as long as your soil is acid, they can be beneficial. Typically, wood ashes contain from one to two percent phosphate, and from four to ten percent potassium. They also contain calcium. The levels will depend on the type of wood being burned, and the completeness of combustion. If wood ashes have been rained on before spreading on your garden, many of the nutrients may have been leached out.

So should you apply wood ashes to your garden? First, get a soil test to determine your soil's pH. If it is acidic, feel free to add a light sprinkling of wood ashes. Avoid heavy applications in small areas. By using a reasonable amount under the right conditions, you'll be adding some nutrient value and eliminating the need for lime.

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What direction is agriculture headed? –by *Bob Kelly, Ag Business Specialist, University of Missouri Extension, Buchanan County*

As we have seen and experienced, agriculture is changing. With higher commodity prices, increased ethanol production and consumption and continued good exports, we have put pressure on the livestock sector in the form of higher feed prices and reduced acres of hay and pasture. The big question that comes to mind is “Where is Agriculture Headed?”

We have been through a few periods like this before and the outcome was not very good for agriculture. Is this one different? Or might we expect a similar outcome to previous prosperous periods?

To help answer some of these questions and to help us gain an understanding of the “real” farm situation, we are having a seminar on April 3, 2008 at Stoney Creek Inn from 10 am to 3 pm. Several representatives of FAPRI, the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute, will discuss the outlook for the livestock industry and the commodity industry. Ron Plain, Ag Economist with the University of Missouri will share information about the ethanol industry and the general economic outlook for agriculture including a discussion of land values and cash rents. We will also have two representatives from the commercial banking industry address their outlooks for agriculture.

Remember to mark your calendars for April 3. Lunch will be served so we ask that you contact the Buchanan County Extension Center at (816) 279-1691 so we can make arrangements for lunch.