

cease. Liquid fertiliser should **not** be applied to potted plants when the mix is very dry - this may result in over-fertilising which can lead to plant loss. Water lightly in these circumstances before fertiliser is applied.

Always consult the analysis on the fertiliser package to ensure that you are buying the correct balance of nutrients for your requirements. It is good practice to make a note of when you feed your plants and what you used - again the memory is not infallible - and a calendar hung in the garden shed is a handy note pad.

### **Foliar Feeding**

Plants take in some nutrients through the leaf surfaces and the application of water soluble fertilisers to the leaves is termed *foliar feeding*, although there is much thought amongst many growers that the importance of this is greatly over-rated. When raising begonias from seed I apply water soluble fertiliser in a spray form from when the second leaf appears and continue this until the seedlings have become established as young plants. Whether this is truly foliar feeding or whether the seedlings are feeding from the fertiliser dripping on to the mix surface is a moot point. I feed begonia cuttings, including stem, leaf and rhizome cuttings, in a similar fashion about two weeks after putting them down and continue this until the plant is potted up and well established, but then I am working in ideal conditions where I have bottom heat and know that root formation begins as soon as the callus is formed. Your particular conditions may well be different and your start time of fertilising may well be later than mine.

Some growers believe that the soluble fertilisers used in foliar feeding should be mixed at half, or even quarter, the recommended strength.

### **Fertiliser Burn**

One way in which plants take up nutrients is through their root hairs by a process called *osmosis*, which simply put is the movement of a liquid through a permeable membrane, in this case ground water in which nutrient salts have dissolved moving through the root hairs. The direction of movement is from an area of low dissolved-salt concentration (ie: the garden soil) to one of higher concentration (ie: the plant itself). *Fertiliser burn* is a term you often hear to explain unexpected wilting of a well watered plant. This may in fact be reverse osmosis brought about by the application of an excess amount of fertiliser that makes the garden soil an area of higher concentration than the plant and causes the moisture in the plant to flow outwards into the surrounding growing medium. Quick re-potting may save the plant or you may attempt to leach out the excess fertiliser by applying copious quantities of water. There may of course be other reasons for the sudden wilting of plants such as over-exposure to heat or wind.