

Compost For Your Plants

Resource Sheet



Compost is usually classified as a soil conditioner rather than a fertilizer, but it contains a good range of major and minor plant nutrients, plus trace elements essential for healthy plant growth. It can be used to help build better soils and improve the health of lawns, gardens, trees, shrubs and houseplants. Since it provides a slow release form of organically based nutrients, it needs to be applied to home landscapes several times during the year. As a general rule, well-decomposed compost can be applied once or twice a year over the whole garden, from one-half to three inches deep.

Compost is truly nature's miracle soil amendment. It builds good soil structure, opening up pore spaces in clay soil to carry air and water deeply into the soil and forms organic aggregates in sandy soils, allowing for the retention of water and nutrients. Since it has the ability to hold almost 100% of its weight in water, it offers drought protection to the soil. As it stimulates disease resistance and healthy plant growth, providing a slow release of macro and micronutrients we gain a new appreciation for the benefits for our entire ecosystem when organic wastes are managed by composting.

The following information lists specific situations benefiting from compost application.

Vegetables

Use compost around transplants, in the seed furrow, buried in trenches and as top dressings lightly worked into the soil around rapidly growing plants. If compost is applied to vegetable gardens in the fall, it can be spread and forked in as partially decomposed material and will be fully decomposed by early spring. Compost applied in summer will allow the soil to hold more moisture and stimulate the growth of beneficial microorganisms.

Flowers

Work compost into the top few inches of soil in annual or perennial beds. Several inches of compost will improve both the fertility and structure of the soil. Beds should be top-dressed several times during the season. Compost 'tea' can also be used as a foliar spray to give a nutrient-rich boost to all flowers.

Lawns

Core aeration, in spring and fall, should be followed by spreading a thin layer of well decomposed compost over the surface. The compost will gradually fill the holes left by aeration and loosen the soil, making it easier for roots to penetrate deeply. When establishing a new lawn, work in at least two inches of compost before seeding or laying down sod.

Trees and Shrubs

Top dress around all trees and shrubs, leaving at least a one-foot area directly around the tree trunk free of compost in order to prevent rodents from burying into it in winter.

Houseplants

Fully matured compost can comprise up to one-quarter of a soilless potting mixes for houseplants as long as it has been screened through a one-quarter inch mesh. Houseplants can benefit from foliar sprays of 'compost tea' every two weeks during the active growth season.

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