USING COMPOST

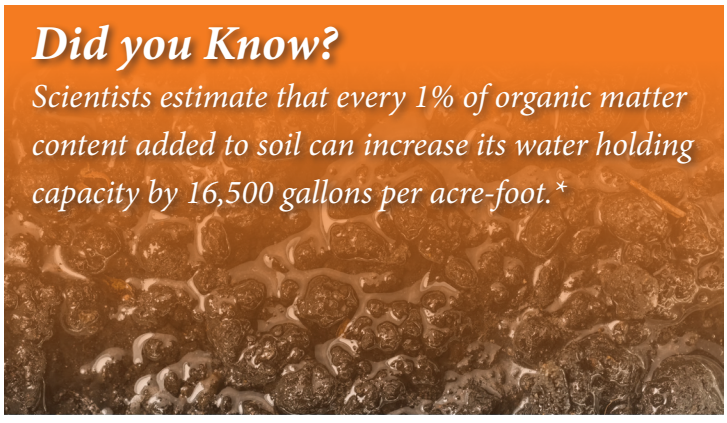
A MIDWEST GROWS GREEN AND ILLINOIS FOOD SCRAP COALITION FACT SHEET

Nurturing soil with compost greatly enhances lawns, gardens and landscapes. Learn more about compost's benefits, sourcing and application from this fact sheet.

COMPOST BENEFITS

Working compost into your yard helps plants and soil in the following ways:

1. **Soil health improvement**
   The organic matter and nutrient content in compost feeds both your plants and soil microbiological life. Soil life raised on compost supports healthy plant growth by cycling nutrients, reducing soil compaction and suppressing plant pathogens. This lessons the need for fertilizer and pesticide use over time.
2. **Stronger soil structure**
   Compost's high organic matter content creates a porous, sponge-like structure that allows for air exchange and makes more water and nutrients available to plants. Compost's glue-like quality reduces compaction and lowers the bulk density of clay soils, while improving water and nutrient retention in sandy soils.
3. **Water Management**
   Compost helps plants survive environmental stressors of droughts and flooding. The high organic matter in compost can help sandy soil hold six times its weight in water. This reduces the need for irrigation during drought periods. Meanwhile, the pores in compost create infiltration space in compact and heavy clay soils. During heavy rain events this sponge-like soil structure allows water to move through the soil without build-up of water that could lead to flooding.



**M. Charles Gould. (2015). Compost increases the water holding capacity of soils. Michigan State University Extension.*

SOURCING HIGH QUALITY AND APPROPRIATE COMPOST

The following two certification programs should help ensure that you are purchasing high quality compost products which meet established standards and which are appropriate for your intended use:

US Composting Council STA

The US Composting Council's Seal of Testing Assurance Program (USCC-STA). USCC-STA tests, labels and discloses information about the certified composts. USCC-STA certified products provide ingredients lists, test results, and suggested directions for using the specific products. Standardized testing protocols assess and report the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of compost. Laboratory results include information about properties including pH, soluble salts, organic matter content, pathogens, trace metals, maturity, stability, and more. Products must meet the U.S. EPA testing limits for heavy metals AND pathogens to be certified! The USCC-STA tests certified composts according to a prescribed schedule to ensure accuracy of the product information disclosed. A comprehensive and standardized Compost Data Technical Sheet (CDTS) is available for each product for each testing cycle.

OMRI Certification

The 501(c)(3) nonprofit Organic Material Review Institute (OMRI) ensures organic integrity by providing independent review of products such as composts, fertilizers, pest controls, livestock health care products and many other inputs intended for use in Certified Organic production and processing. OMRI reviews the products of applicants against the organic standards of the US Department of Agriculture National Organics Program. Acceptable products are OMRI Listed ® and appear on the OMRI Products List© or OMRI Canada Products List©.

Visit the IFSC website to find places to purchase compost in Illinois at bit.ly/ILcomposters.

APPLYING COMPOST TO DIFFERENT LANDSCAPES

Lawns
First core aerate and then top-dress with a ¼" to ½" layer of compost. Reseed and water at no more than 1" per week.

Native landscaping
Spread 1/3" of compost top dressing before seeding or planting.

Raised Flower Beds
Fill the raised bed with compost or a blend of compost and topsoil. Plant annuals or perennials and then mulch.

Vegetable gardens
Use compost as a mulch or soil conditioner in the late fall or early spring before planting. Add ½" to 3" to your garden bed. Rake, shovel or rototill to incorporate the compost into the top 4" of the soil.

TOOLS TO HELP SPREAD COMPOST

Standard landscape material spreaders usually cannot handle and spread compost due to its higher moisture content compared to granular fertilizers, sand or seed. Wheelbarrows, shovels and bow rakes can complete small-scale compost topdressing projects. Larger projects, however, most likely require the purchasing or renting of specialized compost spreading equipment covered below:

Roller Spreader

Originally designed for peat moss, the roller spreader has openings large enough to allow compost to pass through.

Project Type: Small projects such as home lawns.

Push Machine Applicator

This walk behind spreader has a small conveyor and spinner discs to effectively meter out composts of varying moisture contents.

Project Type: Good for contractors, available for rent. Preferable for larger projects such as a sports field.

Tow behind

A tow behind unit with a conveyor belt can drop material in a precise path. Units outfitted with spinner discs results in a wider application path.

Project type: Large projects or spaces where frequent application at high volume is necessary.

Blower Truck

The blower truck operator has a remote on belt to control volume of compost moving through the hose.

Project Type: Good for contractors to use on home lawns.

Midwest Grows Green accomplishes large scale behavior change by sharing pesticide and fertilizer reductioninformation at critical places where lawns and landscapes influence our lives.

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