

January 8, 2010



Tip of the Week

January is prime time to apply compost



Turning the corner into a new year makes the gardening season feel closer at hand. And if you've got a hankering to get outdoors and "do something," January is an ideal time to apply compost regardless of weather. That means toss it on top of the snow.

Even if you are not able to rototill it into the soil, the early application gives the compost adequate time to break down. Compost on its own is low in nutrient value. It's not valuable for what it *is*, but what it *does*--and the doing takes time.

Early composting allows a "mellowing process" that will result in a homogeneous soil mixture ripe with microbial activity. That's why compost that mellows a few months has better results than when it's applied right before planting. This process helps soil hold onto both nutrients and water and that is how it benefits your plants later on.

What kind of compost? Compost by nature is all organic, but some compost "mixes" will have sand and other inorganic material as fillers.

Since you want to promote the most organic activity possible, look for compost with little or no fillers. Also, shop for compost that is well-aged and low in salt.

How much do I need? A good rule of thumb is 1 cubic yard of compost per 100 square feet

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of garden area. Use less if your soil has been well amended in the past.

Best value: Bulk purchases are the most cost effective, so you might get the best deal picking up bulk compost. For reference, a pick-up truck holds about 1 ½ to 2 cubic yards. So if you need this amount--or could share with a neighbor--buying in bulk could save some cash. To buy in bulk and have it delivered to your home usually requires a minimum order of 5 or more cubic yards.

This weekend we're out of the deep freeze. Might be fun to pitch some compost over the garden and daydream about tomatoes.

Reminder: compost is about more than growing veggies. It's a key ingredient when establishing a healthy, low-water lawn and for all the other plants in your landscape. If you are renovating or installing a new landscape, be sure to follow any compost requirements of your water district or municipality.

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