

Compost: Creating a Healthy Lawn from the Ground Up

One man's garbage is another man's gold. This saying is perfect when it comes to compost. It is rather funny that we pile tree limbs and leaves along the curb only to be picked up by a company that uses them to create mulch and compost to sell back to us! What a concept!

Making your own compost is easy but this article is not about making compost. The internet and books have enough information on that subject. Instead, this article is about the benefits of compost, how it works and why it is the most important ingredient for organic lawn care.

An organic lawn requires a well-established microbial community in the soil. As mentioned in our previous articles, synthetic fertilizers release a quick burst of nitrogen or pesticides that often kill the beneficial microbes in your soil. Compost increases and invigorates the microbes in your soil. There are basically two types of compost you can add to your organic lawn. Dry compost, a solid form that looks like black organic-rich soil and the liquid form called "compost tea."

May is a perfect time to apply your dry compost. Top dress your lawn with dry compost after you core aerate. Dump several wheel barrels of compost throughout the lawn. Then rake the piles until you have a consistent ½ inch blanket. You don't have to do your entire lawn at one time. Do the front yard in spring and the rear yard in the fall. One and a half cubic yards will cover 1,000 square feet when applied at a depth of ½ inch. Biosolids are nutrient-rich organic materials resulting from the treatment of sewage sludge. Biosolids can be safely recycled and applied as fertilizer to sustainably improve and maintain productive soils and stimulate plant growth ¹. Some environmentalists feel this product is unsafe because they feel it may contain pharmaceutical products, heavy metals and other toxins. Others feel it is putting a waste product to good use. You can find a biosolid compost product called "TechnaGro" locally here in Akron ². This product is a partnership between the City of Akron and Kurtz Brothers to recycle and reuse sewage treatment waste.

Compost tea is another crucial ingredient in organic lawn care. Compost tea is typically applied once a month from June through August. Some people apply another application of compost tea in the fall. Since it is a liquid form, you do not have to wait for microbes to break the organic matter down. Compost tea is simple to brew but can take a couple of days depending on how powerful your brewer is. Plans are available on the internet to build your own compost tea brewer. If you chose not to attempt the aerobic brewing process then you can use a product called humic acid. This product comes in a liquid form and can be used in an end of hose sprayer. This sprayer attaches to a garden hose and has a dial which controls the amount of humic acid being applied. Ohio Earth Foods ³ in Hartsville, Ohio has products called Bio-Hume Liquid Humus and Maxicrop Liquefied Seaweed. You can blend these two products and apply them to your lawn. It too will stimulate the microbial community and provide nutrients for your lawn.

Why is compost so important for the organic lawn? The majority of the growth in grass happens in the organic matter of your soil. Without organic matter and a vigorous microbial community, an organic lawn cannot sustain. Compost and compost tea provides billions of beneficial microbes consisting of bacteria, fungi, nematodes and many others organisms. These microbes have a symbiotic relationship with your lawn. Compost helps retain moisture and prevent nutrients from leeching in sandy soils. In clay soils, it breaks it up and allows for better drainage. Compost restores compacted soils which is extremely important for new lawns. Compost also allows plant roots to penetrate deeper into the soil. The benefits of compost are endless and compost is the most important ingredient in organic lawn care.

1. <http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/wastewater/treatment/biosolids/index.cfm>
2. <http://www.kbcompost.com/Sales/SM%20&%20Tech%203%20brochure.pdf>
3. <http://ohioearthfood.com/>