

Compost Application



Compost puts life back into soils. Literally. A form of humus/organic matter, it is the end product of the decomposition of organic materials such as leaves and grass, kitchen scraps, manures, etc. For example, Lawrence Community Compost is made from yard trimmings.

Composts vary in components and characteristics, and thus may also have particular uses for which they are best suited. That being said, here are some guidelines for using a mature, general-use compost such as Lawrence Community Compost.

Gardens (both vegetable and flower)

Addition of organic material improves looseness and workability of soil. Many composts also add nutrients that plants require. But just like leaves on a forest floor, the application of organic matter is a gradual process. **Do not plant in 100% compost.**

Kansas State University recommends applying compost at a rate of 50 to 100 pounds per 100 square feet of garden each year. It is best to do this just prior to tillage— either in the spring or fall.

Compost may also be used at a rate of 1 1/2 inches tilled in to a depth of 6 inches.

Lawns

For establishing new lawns, incorporate compost liberally before planting the lawn (either through seed or sod). If your soil is made of clay, you will need at least a 2 inch depth of compost, mixed thoroughly to a depth of 4"-6" to build it up.

To renovate old, patchy lawns, dig up bare spots about 2 inches deep, work in plenty of finished compost, and rake well. Sow your seed after soaking the patches well.

A thin top dressing of compost can also be added each year to provide continual nutrient and organic benefit.

Trees and Shrubs

When planting trees and shrubs, make the planting hole twice the size of the root ball. Blend enough compost into the removed soil so the mix is about 25% compost. Use this enriched soil to backfill. After planting, water well, then top with an inch or two of compost.

Established shrubs may be maintained yearly by working compost into the soil, then mulching.

Potted plants

Incorporate compost into a potting soil blend so the mix is about **25% compost.**

Houseplants benefit from a 1 inch topdressing of compost twice a year.

Use care when potting a plant in a compost blend. Immature composts may damage young seedlings.

According to Lawrence-based Horticulture Extension Agent Bruce Chladny,

“The single best practice gardeners can do to improve their soil is add organic matter. Even though it is only a small part of the total mass, it has a profound effect on the physical and chemical properties of the soil. It increases the water- and nutrient- holding capacity. It helps make minerals available for plant use. And, as it accumulates, it binds clay particles into larger aggregates, improving aeration and drainage. Gardeners can reap the benefits of organic matter by regularly incorporating compost, manure and other organic residues into the soil...”

Sources: Kansas State University Research and Extension's *Making and Using Compost at Home* publication by Charles Marr, Kansas State University, November 1992; *Persistent Herbicides in Kansas Composts: A Benchmark Survey* by William Eberle, Kansas State University Agronomy Department, September 2003; *Organic matter can enhance soil productivity*, article in the March 3, 2005 *Lawrence Journal-World*, by Bruce Chladny, Horticulture Extension Agent for K-State Research and Extension, Douglas County; *Home Composting*, a U.S. Composting Council Fact Sheet, www.compostingcouncil.org/pdf/home_composting_faq.pdf.

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