

COMPOST FACTS



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Compost for Turfgrass and Landscaping

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Composts can be used safely and beneficially as fertilizers and soil conditioners for turfgrasses and landscaping. Research has shown that compost is a valuable and economical soil amendment that can be used for home lawns, parks, institutional grounds, athletic fields, golf courses, and roadsides. Sod farmers should also consider use of compost to produce a lighter sod in a shorter growing time.

Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Rutgers University has demonstrated that on soils with poor physical properties, compost used correctly will produce a better turfgrass than mineral fertilizers. This can be especially important as more homes are built on marginal soils. Compost use rates recommended by the U.S.D.A. for various turfgrass uses are shown on the reverse side of this sheet.

Spring ■ Summer ■ Fall Fertility for Lawns

Golf course managers know that maintaining healthy turf is a year round project. Turfgrass specialists recommend fertilization with nitrogen in spring to give grass the fertility boost it needs to shade out weeds with lush early summer growth. In the fall, fertilization encourages growth of roots to enhance the ability of the grass to absorb nutrients and water from the soil. Compost provides for the release of nitrogen for lush turf throughout the growing season. Organic matter from compost gives turf the resilience it needs to absorb normal traffic wear and reduce compaction that can damage roots.

For best results lawns should be topdressed with compost in the fall and spring when air temperatures are cool. Compost can be applied uniformly with commercial topdressing machines, or it can be distributed over small areas by raking. Some golf course managers will aerate the soil first and then drag the site to distribute the compost into the openings left by aeration.

The Landscaper's Delight

One of the problems landscapers encounter is obtaining a source of inexpensive, but fertile top soil. With top soil going for as much as \$45 per ton (when it is available), compost is an economical and readily available alternative. Compost is a good source of nitrogen, phosphorus, trace minerals, and lime. Compost should be incorporated into the top two to six inches of soil before seeding.

Sod Farmers Take Note.

Compost is an ideal growth medium for turfgrasses. Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue-Kentucky mixtures seeded into a two to six inch layer can produce a harvestable sod within 7 months after fall seeding, compared to 12 to 18 months normally required when compost is not used.

Compost can be spread by using a conventional manure spreader. When seeding into a layer of compost, irrigate the soil surface to leach salts and prevent drying of the surface. For organic sod farmers, a special benefit is that little or no herbicides or commercial fertilizers are needed. Because of the organic matter content of compost, the sod will weigh about 30 to 40% less than comparable mineral soil based sod, increasing the economic distribution radius.

**Various uses and application rates of sewage sludge compost
to achieve fertilizer benefits and soil improvement.**

Use	Compost lbs. per 1,000 square feet †	Remarks
Turfgrasses:		
<i>Establishment</i>		
Soil incorporated	2,000 to 6,000	Incorporate into top 4 to 6 inches of soil. Use lower rate on relatively fertile soil and higher rate on infertile soil.
Surface mulch	600 to 700	Broadcast uniformly on surface before seeding small seeded species (bluegrass) or after seeding large seeded species (fescues).
<i>Maintenance</i>		
	400 to 800	Broadcast uniformly on surface. On cool-season grasses apply higher rate in fall or lower rate in fall and again in early spring.
Sod production when—		
Incorporated with soil	3,000 to 6,000	Incorporate into top 4 to 6 inches of soil.
Unincorporated with soil	6,000 to 18,000	Apply uniformly to surface. Irrigate for germination and establishment.

†1,500 lbs. per 1,000 square feet is approximately equal to 1/2 inch depth of compost. Compost has a bulk density of about 1,000 lbs. per cubic yard at 40% moisture. Source: based on USDA publication ARM-NE-6, August 1979.