

FAQ's

Can I use compost to control pests and diseases?

This is still a bit of an unknown area in Australia but international research has shown great benefits when using compost incorporated into soils to suppress disease in horticultural crops. Research in South Australia is underway to assess the disease suppressive potential of compost and to identify the composts that contribute most to disease suppression so watch this space!!!!

There is some evidence that compost can help with pest control in citrus crops by increasing the numbers of predatory mites in the soil. This potential is also being explored in lettuce crops.

In the future, it is hoped that improved management of pests, disease and crop health can be achieved with the appropriate use of compost and specially developed compost formulations.

I've heard that compost can cause "nitrogen draw-down" – is this true?

Nitrogen draw-down can occur when too much woody material is in the compost. Bacteria will draw nitrogen from the soil to break down this material. This could starve your plants of essential nitrogen, resulting in less plant growth or even plant death. Its important that the compost you use for soil incorporation has a carbon to nitrogen ratio (C:N) below 20:1 to ensure that nitrogen draw-down doesn't occur.

How should I apply my compost and at what rate?

The application method and rate of compost you should apply will depend on what you are trying to achieve with your compost. The quickest

way to improve soil conditions is to broadcast compost. If you are looking to specifically supply nutrients and improve crop establishment compost can be applied just to planting beds, placed in trenches or applied in a band to reduce costs.

The best time to apply compost is just before planting and the typical application range is between 15-30m³/ha. Compost can then be incorporated into the top 10cm of soil. The maximum application rate should not exceed 60m³/ha/year applied either in a single application or split up over the year. When using compost as mulch apply it 2-5mm thick on the planting bed surface.

Can compost provide nutrients to my crop – will I need to change my fertiliser program?

Compost can provide nutrients to your crop and this will depend on a range of factors including the type of compost you use, your farm location, climate, soil type and your type of irrigation. As a general rule you can expect your compost to deliver significant amounts of potassium initially, with a slower release of nutrients such as

nitrogen and phosphorous over time. A nutrient calculator is available to help you predict the nutrient supply from compost.

www.recycledorganics.com/product/agriculture/mulchnutcalc/mulchnutcalc.htm

It's a good idea to monitor your soil and plants so that you can adjust your fertilizer applications if necessary.

Fertiliser savings can cover at least one half to two thirds of the cost of applying compost.

Should I be applying compost every year?

Regular applications of compost will increase the level of soil carbon/organic matter in the soil which is essential for good vegetable production. The levels of soil organic carbon will decrease over time unless they are replenished and regular applications can achieve this. Regular applications of compost will also reduce bulk density, improving potential root growth, water drainage and infiltration. Compost can also supply nutrients to your crop and regular applications may decrease the need for fertiliser applications and irrigations.





To work out when and how often you should be applying compost it is essential that soil/plant testing is undertaken to get a picture of the needs of your farm and how you can maximise your production using the appropriate compost application.

Could compost bring in pests or diseases?

Good quality compost will not bring any pests or diseases into your farm. Compost used for soil incorporation should be fully matured and stabilised, pasteurised and microbially transformed for not less than 6 weeks. After this process the compost contains no weed seeds or pathogens and is a matured, stabilised product. You should check that your compost meets the Australian standards and your supplier should be able to provide you with a recent analysis of the material.

Can I use compost on saline soils?

Yes! Great results have been achieved by using compost and compost mulch on saline soils. Compost mulch increases the rate of water infiltration and reduces evaporation, which means that less salt accumulates at the surface and your topsoil is less saline. This provides a better environment for plant growth.

How do I know what's in my compost?

Your compost supplier should provide you with a recent analysis of the compost you are planning to purchase, indicating how it meets the Australian standards. It is also a good idea to visit the composting facilities to make sure you are satisfied with the quality of the materials they use and their processing standards.

Will using compost save water?

Using compost can save you water, but it can also put the water you do apply to your veggies to much better use! Some studies in Australian vegetable crops have shown water savings of 10 – 20%!

Saving water...

Compost mulches conserve soil moisture by preventing evaporation. Even a shallow layer of organic matter on top of the soil can slow down this process and conserve soil moisture. This results in the need for less irrigation – an outcome that will benefit every grower. Compost mulches are a great option to conserve soil moisture and potentially decrease irrigation, while at the same time maintaining and even increasing crop yields.

Incorporation of compost can increase the ability of the soil to hold water, which puts the water you apply to much better use, and can decrease the amount you need to apply. The water holding capacity of light sandy soils in particular, is greatly improved by the application of compost.

More information

www.compostforsoils.com.au

Jeffries Group

Paul Bowden 0400 366 031

Peats Soil and Garden Supplies

Peter Wadewitz 0418 791 921

Van Schaik's Bio Gro

Graham Crowder 0412 838 053

Craig Torney 0412 850 524

