

ORGANIC PEPPERS AND CUCUMBERS THRIVE IN COMPOST

Background information

Organic production is growing from strength to strength at Cantelo Nurseries Limited. Based in Somerset, Cantelo is a family business which has been established for over 60 years. Traditionally, the company has been famed for its tomatoes but, at its Chilton site, it is now successfully focusing on the production of premium organic peppers and cucumbers.

In 1998, Cantelo Nurseries took the step of allocating 2.8 hectares of its eleven hectare glasshouse production at Chilton to organic growing. The main crop grown at the time was long season tomatoes, from cherry to cocktail and classic, mostly sold on the vine to Tesco, Waitrose and local retailers.

After growing organic tomatoes for five seasons, production has gradually moved over the last two years from tomatoes to organic green, yellow, orange and red peppers, and organic cucumbers for Tesco and Waitrose. The decision for the change in crop was a result of market demands and the company is now one of two main suppliers of organic peppers in England.

During this time, the nurseries have used BSI PAS 100 compost, produced from garden prunings, grass cuttings and leaves, supplied by Wyvern Waste, also based in Somerset, to improve soil health and ensure excellent yields.

Cantelo Nurseries uses up to 100 tonnes of Wyvern Waste's BSI PAS 100 certified soil improver per hectare. The company choose certified compost as it is easily available, reasonably priced and does a great job. Producing three cucumber crops a year and one pepper crop, Cantelo has found that one application of compost is enough, even though cucumbers are a heavy feeding crop.

Cantelo has also found that using compost allows planting of the same crop year after year, as it replenishes nutrients and improves soil structure. Better soil structure leads to stronger roots, improved moisture retention and therefore boosted plant growth. The company has also seen some disease suppressive benefits.



Importantly, the compost meets Soil Association and Assured Produce standards, which in turn means that the certification guidelines for organic produce set by Tesco, Nature's Choice, Waitrose, and Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) are met.

The peppers and cucumbers are grown in the nursery's own mix, which is a combination of composted bark, Cantelo's own composted vegetable and fruit waste mixed with straw, sawdust, cardboard and Wyvern Waste's soil improver. The mix is produced with varying proportions of each element according to availability.

The certified compost is also used as a mulch, which acts as an excellent weed suppressant and the gradual breakdown of the woodier material slowly releases nutrients into the soil.

The boom in the organic produce market and their flexibility and willingness to experiment, has meant that Cantelo Nurseries has been very successful in using green alternatives and growing first class vegetable produce.

Key Facts

- Compost adds organic matter giving soil a more workable structure which leads to improved root growth and better plant establishment.
- Compost is biologically very active and full of micro-organisms, which can help provide resistance to brown root rot, verticillium and other soil borne diseases.
- Compost is normally high in potassium, which is great for growing vegetables – ensuring a good yield, excellent quality, healthy plants and happy customers.



Cantelo Nurseries uses compost in its production of peppers



The end result - premium peppers

Comment

Juan Rodriguez, Technical Supervisor at Cantelo Nurseries, said: "The relatively cheap cost of certified compost and the long list of benefits have allowed us to grow two crop species organically, for seven consecutive years in some glasshouses, without having to sterilise the soil and therefore not having to incur the enormous costs involved in such an operation."

Kevin Bishop, Recycling Manager at Wyvern Waste Services Ltd, said: "With our BSI PAS 100 certification, organic fruit and vegetable growers can be reassured that our products are of a high standard and will help them produce the results needed. We have demonstrated that compost is a viable option for commercial growers."

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For more information, visit the WRAP website on www.wrap.org.uk/organics or call the WRAP freephone helpline on 0800 100 2040. Please quote reference number 19ORG.

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