AGRESOURCE
ROOTED IN SUCCESS

Spring Newsletter 2014

Using Compost when Planting Annuals

It has been a winter for our record books and we are all looking forward to signs of Spring. Planting cool annuals is way of celebrating spring and a beautiful way to brightened up dull looking planting beds.

In order to ensure beautiful long lasting spring blooms, many of our landscape contractors add AGRESOIL COMPOST to the existing flower beds so as to not shock or stress new plants in the still cold ground. Typically, the compost is worked into the beds at about ¼ to 1/3 by volume. The slow release of nutrients to the flowers will keep them healthy and in bloom. The addition of AGRESOIL COMPOST will also create the proper balance of drainage versus moisture holding that is essential to keeping spring annuals hydrated.

Many landscape contractors use AGRESOIL COMPOST as a mulch layer on top of the planting beds. ***Most mulch today has a high percentage of wood***. Wood-based mulches are high in carbon and tend to take nitrogen away from plants. ***Using AGRESOIL COMPOST as mulch helps protect plants and has the added benefit of building the soil so that plants can thrive.*** An added benefit is that it does not have to be removed each year as woody mulches should.

Compost and Soil Testing

Composts distributed by Agresource are routinely tested so our customers can be assured that they are getting a consistent product and can select the particular product that will best suit their needs. For our New England customers we have routinely used the services of the University of Massachusetts Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Laboratory located in Amherst MA.

Recently the UMass lab has made changes to its compost testing program and you will notice differences in the reports that are now being provided. Compost samples are now tested using *Test Methods for the Examination, Composting and Compost* (TMECC) developed by the US Composting Council. Results are reported on both a dry weight basis and the moist (as received) basis. The bulk density of the sample is determined and quantity (e.g. lbs) per cubic yard of compost is also reported to assist in determining the application rates.

Perhaps the biggest change is that now nutrients are reported as the total amount in the compost whereas in the past compost was tested like soil and the extractable nutrient levels were determined and reported. For example, in the past you were provided with the extractable level of Phosphorus whereas now you are getting the total Phosphorus in the compost. The amount of the nutrients that is available to plants is usually only a percentage of the total value and this should be taken into consideration when using composts.

Agresource recommends that before applying compost that a recent soil test is obtained so that the compost application rate can be adjusted. Make sure that you take a good representative sample of the soil and include testing for Organic Matter. Compost may not always be needed if adequate soil organic matter is present in the existing soil. Test results will also allow you to adjust (most likely reduce) use of fertilizer applications. In cases where drainage is critical, such as sports fields, soil texture should also be included. Instructions on collecting soil samples and test forms are available on the UMass web site (http://soiltest.umass.edu/ordering-information).
Whether you use the UMass testing services or another laboratory, Agresource can assist you with the interpretation of test results and assist you with selecting the compost source that best meets your needs.

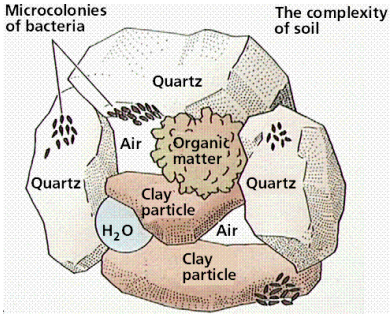
Organic Matters—What is "Organic"?

Over the past several years there has been an increasing demand for "organic" products in landscaping. Customers often ask "is your soil organic". This begs the question, what is organic soil? Some people want to know if it is "certified organic". Others are concerned about potential contaminates. Some just want to know where it came from while others just don't know what they mean by "organic".

Most of the concerns that people have about soil can be satisfied by an understanding of the role of Soil Organic Matter (SOM) content. This is the actual percent of organic matter that is present in soil and can be measured directly in a soil lab. The soil organic matter consists of the living and dead organisms as well as the various products of decomposition (often referred to as humus). If soil has an adequate soil organic matter content, it will function well and do all the things people might expect from "organic soil" to protect human health, shield the environment, and promote plant growth.

Soil organic matter helps protect the environment and human health by degrading potential pollutants that are made of organic molecules such as herbicide, pesticides, and hydrocarbons (petroleum byproducts). It effect, it is helps to clean soil because it provides a home for microbial activity. Soil organic matter increases soil's Cation Exchange Capacity (CEC) helping to bind metals and preventing them from leaching into the water table. Raising CEC also assists to make nutrients more available for plant uptake. As organic matter breaks down in the soil, nutrients are released slowly, thus unlike most commercial fertilizers the nutrients are not washed away by rain.

Appropriate levels of soil organic matter content vary, but a rule of thumb for a healthy lawn is to have 5% to 8% SOM. For gardens and planting beds 6% to 12% soil organic matter content is a good range to achieve. Local testing labs can check the organic matter content of the soil and soil should be tested before adding compost.



Essential components of soil including organic matter are shown in the image above.

Sales Position Available at Agresource

Agresource, Inc., a leading supplier of compost products in New England, is seeking an experienced sales person to sell compost, soils, and mulch products. Candidate must be

highly self-motivated, assertive, and have knowledge of soil, turf and/or horticulture. Horticultural or turf degree is a plus. Good communication and customer relation skills are essential. Familiarity with on-line database servers is helpful. Candidates must be willing to travel throughout southern New England. Agresource offers a competitive salary and benefits, with opportunity for commission. Send resume with cover letter to Agresource, Inc., 100 Main Street, Amesbury, MA 01913 or email to **resume@agresourceinc.com**