The Compost Conundrum
Liz Katz, Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline

You know it’s good stuff. You’ve read it will keep down the weeds and help retain water and nutrients. You probably add it to your garden once a year. But what about when you create a new shrub bed, or plant your tomatoes in containers? Keep two things in mind when you add compost to your garden – it isn’t soil and it isn’t fertilizer.

Didn’t the plants do fine without compost before we came along?
In a natural ecosystem, the plants and animals are constantly replacing and recycling the organic matter, adding to the soil’s tilth, improving drainage, increasing soil moisture retention and creating a very slow release of nutrients. Over years, plants create their own compost. Undisturbed lowland areas in the Puget Sound have up to 3.5 feet of forest duff soil, which has four to six percent organic content.

That top layer of soil was removed to level the ground when housing was built, leaving us with subsoil and without all of the wonderful organic matter. The average organic content of subsoil in our area is less than one percent. Also, it has long been the practice for gardeners to remove leaf litter from their landscapes. In order to replenish this valuable resource, we need to add our own organic matter.

It isn’t soil.
As a beginning gardener, I made the mistake of adding a foot of compost to my parking strip without incorporating it. I installed my drought tolerant plants di-
The Future of Farming

Tilth Producers of Washington’s annual conference, “The Future of Farming,” will be held November 10-12, 2006 at the Red Lion at the Quay in Vancouver, Washington. The conference will build on three decades of efforts to transform agriculture in Washington State.

Friday’s day-long Washington State University Symposium, Farming for Food Quality, will raise awareness of the agricultural factors that influence food quality, including crop genetics and production practices. By providing information that links food quality to specific practices and production systems, food processors, manufacturers, farmers, and consumers can make more informed choices in the ongoing effort to enhance the quality of the American food supply.

Saturday begins with a keynote address, “Bringing the Food Economy Home,” by Helena Norberg-Hodge, a leading analyst on the impact of the global economy on cultures and agriculture world wide. She is a co-founder of the International Forum of Globalisation and the founder director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture. Norberg-Hodge will address many aspects of localization, including the key reasons for creating a local farm and food economy, the impact of globalization and Peak Oil, and the cultural effects of the current globalized economy.

Workshops on Saturday afternoon and Sunday include: “Organic Dairy Production” by Andrew Dykstra and John Banson; “Decisions Facing Beginning Farmers” by Colin Barricklow, Genine Bradwin, Mike Peroni; “Agricultural Labor and Sustainability” by Mike Gempler, Maria Cuevas and Rosalinda Guillen; and “Creating a Locally-Based Regional Food System” by Harry MacCormack, among many others.

Tilth Producers of Washington is an independent nonprofit association of organic and sustainable growers, agricultural businesses and researchers. The statewide group promotes ecologically sound, economically viable and socially equitable farming practices that improve the health of Washington’s communities and natural environment. The full program and registration details is available online at www.tilthproducers.org or by calling 206 442-7620.

Transitions

Samantha Maykut stepped down from the Natural Lawn & Garden Staff after the early arrival of daughter Raina. Mother and daughter are doing well, along with father Chris Maykut, owner of Chaco Canyon Café, a frequent donor of snacks for event volunteers.

Seattle Tilth Association is a non-profit organization and an urban chapter within Tilth’s regional network.

Our Mission Statement
Seattle Tilth inspires and educates people to garden organically, conserve natural resources, and support local food systems in order to cultivate a healthy urban environment and community.

Board of Directors
Nancy Evans
Willi Evans
Secretary Nicole Kistler
Beth Lenholt
Treasurer Brandon Pemberton
Renee Rhone
Jayne Simmons
Vice President Craig Skipston
President Neal Thayer

Staff Members
Lorraine Brooks Natural Soil Building Program (nsb)
Andrea Cummins Natural Soil Building Program
Kathy Dang Demonstration Garden Coordinator
Keala Hagmann Office Assistant
Liz Katz Natural Soil Building Program
Karen Luettej Executive Director
Charlotte Moss Bookkeeper
Laura Niemi Demonstration Garden Coordinator
Sam O’Brien Children’s Garden Assistant Teacher
Amy Ockerlander Natural Soil Building Program
Colleen Quinn Manager, NSB Program
Angelina Still mcasa Volunteer Coordinator
Lisa Taylor Children’s Garden Coordinator

Office Hours and Phones
Monday—Friday, 10 am–5 pm or by appointment
206 633-0451 Office Phone
206 633-0224 Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline
206 633-0097 Master Composters/Soil Builders
206 633-5045 Volunteer Line

Website
www.seattletilth.org

Email
Send to firstname.lastname@seattletilth.org

Address
Seattle Tilth Association, 4649 Sunnyside Avenue North, Room 120, Seattle, Washington 98103

Seattle Tilth Newsletter
The Seattle Tilth Newsletter is published by the Seattle Tilth Association. Readers are encouraged to submit articles, ideas for articles, original artwork, and other commentary. All material should be mailed c/o The Newsletter to the address above or e-mailed to karenluettej@seattletilth.org. Submissions will be printed as space allows. Seattle Tilth reserves the right to edit for interest, length, and style.

Design and typesetting by Keala Hagmann.
Finding Focus
Neal Thayer, President, Seattle Tilth Board of Directors

“We must reject the idea – well-intentioned, but dead-wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become ‘more like a business.’” Those are the opening words of a monograph by Jim Collins, best selling author of the corporate best-seller Good to Great. Using Collins’ work, Kurt O’Brien, an organizational consultant with the University of Washington Medical Center has been working with Tilth’s staff and board to explore and define what has made Tilth successful in the past and what will lead us into the future.

Collins’ study of organizations that have sustained excellence suggests that such organizations focus on three things: knowing what they’re passionate about, doing what they’re good at, and getting the resources they need.

Over the summer, the Tilth staff and board have come together to explore these things for Tilth. So far, we’ve working on uncovering the core purpose of the organization, the ‘passion’ piece that Collins talks about. This is an effort to name what’s present in the organization at its heart, naming it in such a way that we gain clarity of purpose. With a clear statement of the place Tilth has held in the community for nearly 30 years – the purpose we’ve served – we’re prepared to move forward into a successful future.

Still a work in progress, we’ve distilled the purpose of the organization down to something like, “gardening organically because the world depends on it.”

For 28 years, Seattle Tilth has played an important role in our community, serving as the city’s center of knowledge for organic gardening. The work we’re doing with Kurt will prepare us for what look like promising times for Tilth.

Does your garden tell a story?

Seattle Public Utilities is looking for gardeners to share their inspirational, informative garden stories. Gardens should exemplify organic soil building, water conservation, pesticide-free approaches and other elements that help benefit our environment. Learn more at www.savingwater.org/outside_gardenstories.htm
Thanks to Harvest Fair Sponsors:

Coordinators:
Liza Burke & Laura Dahlem

Tomato Tasting:
Laura Niemi, Kathy Dang & James Morse

City Chickens Exhibit:
Angelina Shell
Kid’s Stuff: Lisa Taylor & Sam O’Brien

Accounting:
Charlotte Moss

Farmers
Bartella Farms
Boistfort Valley Farm
Burnt Ridge Orchards
Crow’s Daughters
Earthly Goods
Homestead Organic Produce
Jerzy Boyz Farm
Jubilee Farm
King’s Garden
Kirosop Farms
Pipitone Farm
Rising River Farm
Seattle Youth Garden Works
Victory’s Organic Gardens
Willie Green’s Organic Farm

Music
Music Coordination: Kelda Miller
Sound: Pete Covell
Kevin Auld, bagpiper
Phil Brooks & Terry Wergeland, jazz duo
Zazou, popular French Jazz/American swing sextet
Opossum Wranglers, country swing trio
Mudcat, swingin’ blues funk rock
Klez Katz, rockin’ Klezmer music
Alex Bailey, mandolin and guitar
The Tallboys, old time swing band

Friends of the Fair
Rose Ellen Brittenham, Seattle Parks Liaison
Cedar Grove
Composting
Chaco Canyon Café
Depth of Field Photography
Essential Baking Company
Full Circle Farm

Thanks to Our Other Contributors:

Northgate Chiropractic
SolarWashington.org
PUGET SOUND FRESH
Northgate Chiropractic

New Roots Organics

Seattle Holistic Center
Thanks to our amazing volunteers!

Kristiana Abbit
Brian Allen
Brad Bantel
Rick Barrett
Gordon Burch
Doug Collins
Janis Cotton
Calvin Creasey
Jeanne Cullen
Pamela Dales
Joshua Dallen
Lisa Daly
Cleo Daly
Julian Daly
Sue Dehmlow
Liz Dehmlow
Justine Dell’Arlinga
Shawn Dempsey
Miriam Dyak
Alison Dyck
Jeannie Evans
Nancy Evans
Mike Ewanciw
Paul Farley
Karen Fletcher
Renee Fredrickson
Janet Gabbert
Sky Gathering
Jeremiah Grams
Noam Gundel
Thomas Hargrave
Lena Hart-Bundy
Sue Hartman
Patti Hawthorne
Rachel Hein
Jeri Helen
Liz Herlevi
Jessica Herrington
Sylvia Kantor
Wynona Karbo
Richard Keber
Jo King
Katie Kramer
Sarah Kulfan
Olaia Land
Joyce Larson
Norm Lee
Cam Lehouilleir
Beth Lenholt
Julie A. Lleyson
Duke Luetjhen
Gary Luke
Tricia Lunning Moon
David Miles
Teri Milstein
Cristina Mone
James Morse
Jen Mullen
Leslie Nakagawa
Mary Nickerson
Jamie Northern
Sandy Pederson
Brandon Pemberton
Keith Posse
Robyn Prang
Katie Rankin
Crystal Rawlings
Baker Rawlings
Renee Rhone
Jim Roe
Sonja Rogneby
Anisha Shankar
Nileem Shankar
Olga Shargorodska
Townley Simons
Craig Skipton
Lois Soiffer
Jenny Spears
Celina Steiger
Roshni Tewari
Norm Tjaden
Steve Tracy
Steve Tracy
Kim Verderoff
Alice Wice
Victoria Wilson
Michelle Wong
Adinah Wyle
Christine Yarrow
The Compost Conundrum

Continued from page 1

rectly into the compost. What I didn’t re-
alize was that compost continues to break
down and must be replaced. After a year
or two, the roots of the woody plants in
this bed were completely exposed.

When you establish a new planting
area, evaluate the type of soil you have
in order to determine how much organic
matter to add. You would add more com-
post to sandy soils than to clay soils. The
Hotline has information on how to deter-
mine the texture of your soil.

The general soil amendment rate for
low-organic soils is to add one to four
inches of compost. Remember that the
compost keeps decomposing and you are
striving for a slow build-up over time.

The decomposition process is making
the soil structure more open for plant roots,
holding the water for them, making the
pH more neutral, and providing a home
for the microorganisms that allow plants
to grow well.

And it’s not fertilizer.
The soil from our area is very poor in nu-
trients. Every time it rains some nutri-
ents leach out of our soil and (eventually)
into the Sound. The millennia of winter
rains have left our area with soil that sup-
ports native plants, but which doesn’t
have enough nutrients for demanding
plants like our highly bred vegetables and
succulent flowering plants.

When you think about it, it makes
sense that the nutrient value of compost
is going to depend on what it is made
from. It also depends on how it is made
and how completely decomposed it is. The
typical compost we buy doesn’t have the
volume of minerals and nutrients most
plants require. Cedar Grove compost, for
example, has 1.10 percent available nitro-
gen, 0.40 percent phosphorus and 1.10
percent potassium. In contrast, fish meal,
still a natural fertilizer source, may have
10 percent nitrogen, 5 percent phos-
phorus and 2 percent potassium. Also, com-
post releases nutrients very slowly, so it
not a reliable substitute for fertilizer.

What it is.
Compost is a soil conditioner that is a fab-
ulous companion to fertilizer. It enables
the soil to retain water and nutrients for
gradual use by plants. Incorporated in
the soil it increases the microbial life that
makes those nutrients more available to
your plants. Just don’t expect compost
to provide anchorage for plant roots or
the minerals of the other soil components
of clay, sand and loam. Call the Natural
Lawn & Garden Hotline at 206 633-0224
to request Growing Healthy Soil guide for
more information on using compost in
your landscape.

Sources: Colorado State University
Cooperative Extension, Paul Rosenfeld
(UW College of Forest Resources),
Steve Solomon, Howard Stern, David
MacDonald (Seattle Public Utilities)
Join Seattle Tilth!

O New Member  O Renewing Member  O New contact information?
Name(s) ___________________________________________________________
Address __________________________________________________________
City/State/Zip ______________________________________________________
Phone ___________________________  E-mail ____________________________

Membership levels  O $30 Regular  O $50 Supporter
O $100 Sustaining  O $500 Lifetime  O $15 Limited Income

Adopt-A-Program  Yes, I would like to make a tax-deductible
contribution to support Seattle Tilth operations.
$_______ per  O Month  O Year  O Check  O Charge  O Invoice
Card # _______________________________________  Exp __________
Name on card ______________________________________________________

Maritime Northwest Garden Guide
For an indispensable regional guide to year-round
gardening enclose $12.50 (includes tax and postage)
per copy. Please send me _____ copies.
Mail to Seattle Tilth, 4649 Sunnyside Ave N,
Room 120, Seattle, Washington 98103

Naked Gardener
... is on hiatus

Classifieds

Cynthia Creasey, real estate agent specializing
in gardens that come with houses in Seattle.
Call 206 276-8292, Lake & Co. Real Estate.

Rain Barrels. 60 gallon, food clean, fully
assembled with brass fittings and removable
mesh screen. Available in black, terra cotta and blue. Excellent value, only $57.50 each
(delivery and installation available).
Call or e-mail me, Dan Borba, at 253-272-8173,
naturalrainwater@yahoo.com. Harvesting the
rain since 1999.

Calvin Creasey, Natural Gardening.
Rose care and pruning. The best plants,
grandly grown. 206 789-6456.

Green Light Gardening Consultation,
design, and pruning lessons. Specializing
in helping you create a wildlife-friendly
and child-friendly garden with year-round
beauty. Emily Bishton, 206 523-1774 or
www.greenlightgardening.com

Worm composting on the Eastside?
Red wigglers for sale. Call Judy, 425-868-2694,
or email judy1007@comcast.net.

Professional worm bin consultant.
Specializing in worm bin set up and operation.
$40 for 1 hour consultation and informational
material. Tilth member and student discounts.
Call Barb at Wiggle Worm Farm, 206 297-7303.

See your garden with new eyes –
Experienced and thoughtful pruning and
personal instruction on how to manage
your landscape. Katy 206 782-7113
or www.gardenvision.net

Adopt-A-Program
Yes, I would like to make a tax-deductible
contribution to support Seattle Tilth operations.
$_______ per  O Month  O Year  O Check  O Charge  O Invoice
Card # _______________________________________  Exp __________
Name on card ______________________________________________________

Maritime Northwest Garden Guide
For an indispensable regional guide to year-round
gardening enclose $12.50 (includes tax and postage)
per copy. Please send me _____ copies.
Mail to Seattle Tilth, 4649 Sunnyside Ave N,
Room 120, Seattle, Washington 98103

Students in Noam Gundle’s science classes at
Ballard High School made a summer journey
to Costa Rica to help promote sustainability,
organic and fair trade agriculture and
homegrown biodiesel systems. Students built
two biodiesel systems before their trip in July.
They were welcomed in Costa Rica by Arturo
Segura, farmer at Finca Sol Colibri in Santa
Maria de Dota, Costa Rica. Segura, a longtime
community activist, owns the Seattle-based
business Sol Colibri Coffee that is Seattle
Tilth’s official coffee sponsor in 2006. Segura is
co-founder of a Foundation that is protecting
Costa Rican forest land from destruction and
proceeds of his sales also benefit local farmer’s
markets. To order Sol Colibri Coffee, see www.
solcolibri.com.
Putting the Garden to Bed

Sun, Oct 22, 11 am–12:30 pm, Bradner Gardens Park
OR Sat, Nov 12, 11 am–12:30 pm, Good Shepherd Center

The rain and dark has snuck up on us and the garden is winding down. Grab those last few days of sunshine and put your garden to bed. Fall is a fantastic time to replenish the soil that has offered you its bounty all year long. Learn inexpensive or free ways to build your soil using materials on hand. Let the Tilth gardeners show you how a little work now will pay off big time next spring. Each clinic costs $15 for Tilth members, $18 for non-members. Pre-registration in required.

Earth Steward Garden Tours

Fun, hands-on garden field trips for school groups in preschool through sixth grade.

Seattle Tilth Children’s Gardens, Good Shepherd Center
Sept 19–Nov 3 and Mar 13–June 8. Tuesday–Friday at 10 am or 1 pm.
$4.50 per child / $65.00 minimum. Reservations are now being made for Fall 2006 and Spring 2007. Spaces fill quickly. Call soon to reserve a date.

Groups of children engage all their senses through exploration and hands on activities in the garden. We taste herbs and flowers, touch the soft and the prickly, forage in the soil to discover compost critters and allow children to find the unexpected delights of gardening. All tours begin with an introductory activity and two or three other garden “stations.” Children learn and practice important garden activities such as making compost, planting, tending and harvesting crops, collecting seeds and other seasonal activities. Visit once or make a series of visits to build on gardening and environmental concepts. For more information, contact Seattle Tilth at 206 633-0451 x2 or www.seattletilth.org

Garden Tour of the Good Shepherd Center

Sat, Oct 7, 10 am–noon

Groundskeeper Gil Schieber will lead a tour featuring some of the 800 species and varieties of trees, shrubs and perennials around the Good Shepherd Center. Since 1985 Gil has interspersed native plants with rare specimens into unique garden rooms surrounding the historic building. A few of the plants you may view are: Eucalyptus, Evergreen Dogwood, Androgenous Butcher’s Broom, and many rare climbers. The grounds are maintained without pesticides and little irrigation is used. Advance registration is required for this tour and space is limited, $8 for Tilth members, $10 for non-members.

City Chickens 101

Sat, Nov 11, 10 am–noon, Good Shepherd Ctr Room 140 (Senior Center)

An introduction to chicken husbandry in an urban and suburban setting. You will learn the most important considerations in caring for a small flock of hens in limited space, including chicken physiology, behavior, health, nutrition, housing and city regulations. This class also covers the wide variety of chicken breeds. Questions are encouraged. You will leave this class with everything you need to know to start raising chickens in your own backyard. Each class costs $18 for Tilth members, $22 for non-members. Advance registration and payment is required.