

What is compost?

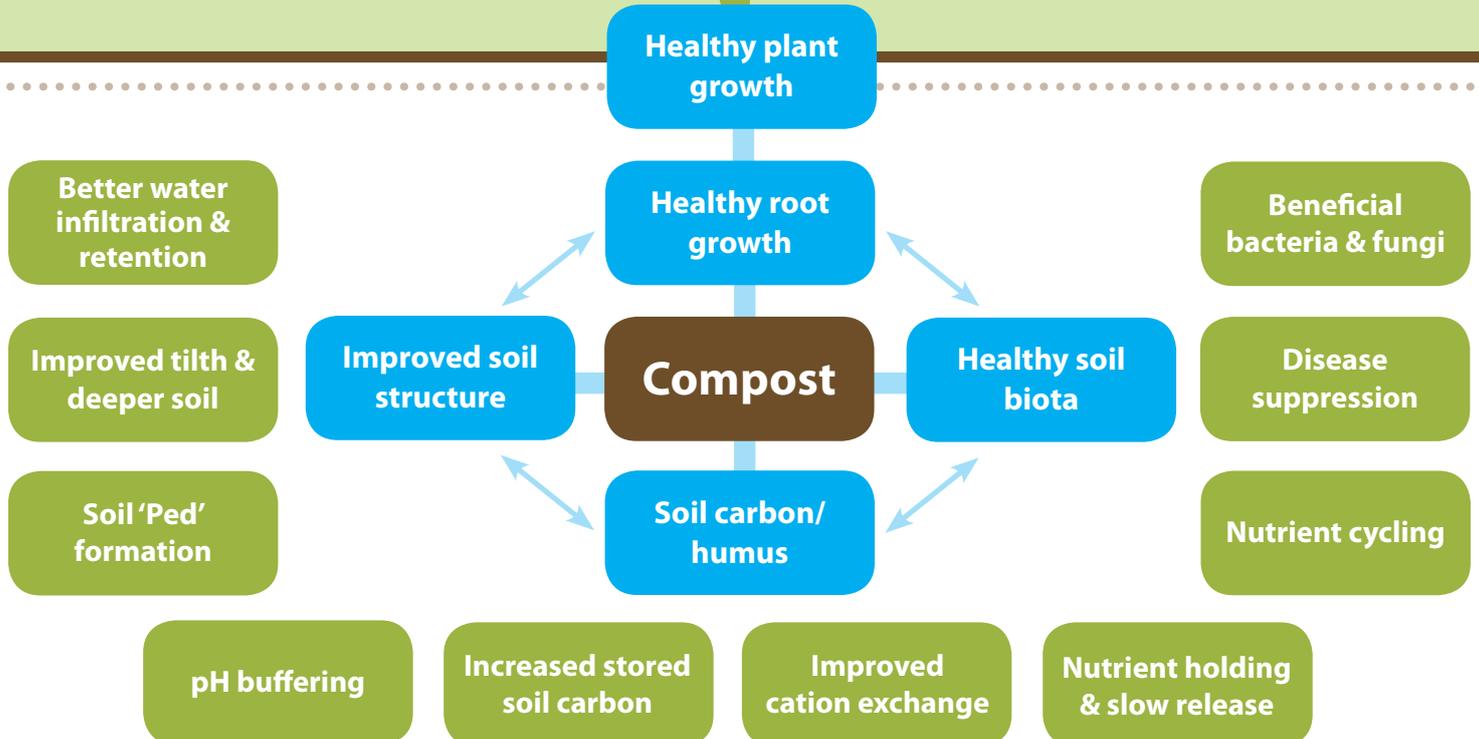
Compost is organic matter that has been through a controlled process of natural aerobic decomposition.

Compost products typically contain:

- soil-conditioning organic matter and humus
- beneficial micro-organisms
- organic carbon
- some immediate and slow release nutrients

Good quality compost products are dark coloured with a sweet, natural earthy or 'forest-floor' smell. They are available commercially or can be made on farm.

There are compost products for a range of different situations or needs, including soil conditioners, mulch, biological enhancers and organic fertilisers.



Compost improves soil health & boosts plant growth.

What is a soil conditioner?

The organic matter, humus and biological activity of composts can improve:

- soil structure and tilth
- soil health
- fertility
- nutrient holding capacity
- moisture holding capacity

What is a mulch?

Mulches can be used for water conservation and weed control. Larger woody particles that have been through the composting process can be screened into both fine and coarse mulches.

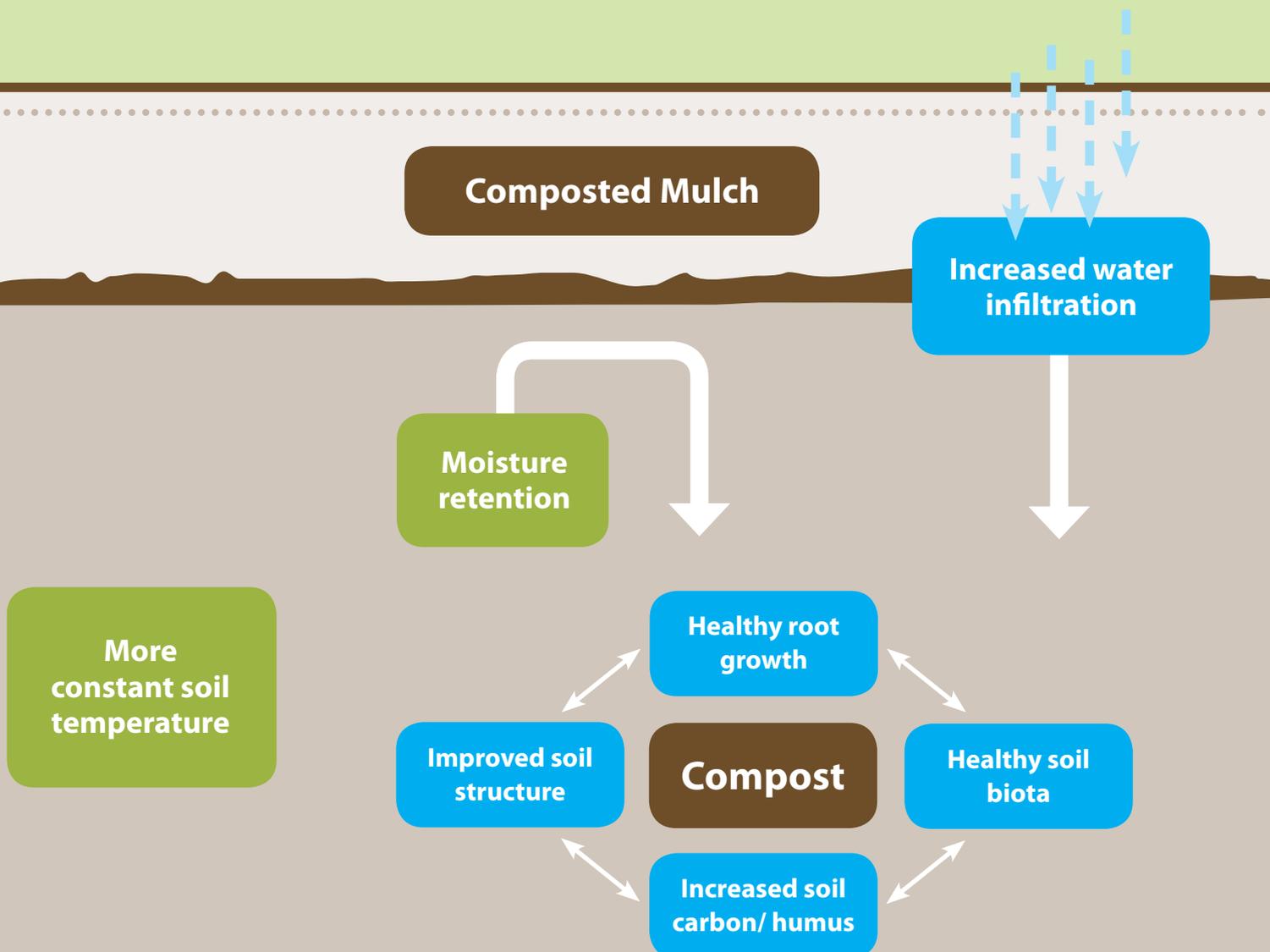
Composted mulches are typically 'heat hardened' and will last for a number of years after application.

They also contain micro-organisms and some humus, which conditions the soil.

What are 'biological' enhancers?

Composts contain beneficial soil micro-organisms (e.g. bacteria, fungi, protozoa) that can improve soil health and suppress plant diseases.

Composts with high levels of soil biota can also be used to make compost 'teas'.



What is an organic fertiliser?

Although composts provide some nutrients which enhance soil fertility, they are not typically used as fertilisers, unless the composts have had higher nutrient feedstock or additives introduced.

At different stages of the composting process there are different levels of plant-available nutrients.

Typically, older and more matured composts will have more plant-available nutrients.



No Composted Mulch

More weeds

More run off -
water loss
& erosion

Greater
evaporation
losses

Lower soil carbon &
poorer structure

Composted mulch benefits your soil system.

What can composts do?

Composts can boost soil and plant health, and improve the resilience & productivity of farming systems. Composts typically produce the best results on poorer soils and in areas where water availability is a limiting factor. The right compost product, used correctly, can:

- improve soil structure, tilth and depth
- conserve soil moisture
- improve water infiltration
- increase the nutrient and water holding capacity of soil
- keep soil temperatures more constant; cooler in summer and warmer at night
- improve soil health
- suppress diseases. Beneficial bacteria, fungi and other biota in composts can compete with and even prey on pathogenic fungi and bacteria

- provide slow release nutrients for plants
- promote the cycling of nutrients by soil micro-organisms, building & maintaining a stock of plant-available nutrients
- reduce the need for fertilisers & pesticides
- improve root and plant growth. In turn, improved root and plant growth provides organics to the soil which builds soil carbon, soil biology and soil structure and depth. Compost can be used as a starter with periodic 'booster' applications to build and maintain healthy soils.

The actual attributes and performance of compost products will depend on their quality and the ways in which they are used.



A program of the Australian Organics Recycling Association Limited

For more information and a list of quality suppliers, go to

www.compostforsoils.com.au

the resource for compost producers and users