

Compost for Landscaping

There is a long list of benefits to be gained with the use of compost. One of the advantages for landscapers and parks and gardens operators is its versatility and effectiveness for different applications.

When it comes to your bottom line proper use of compost can reduce plant loss, which will reduce the overall cost of a project.



The Benefits of Compost

The unique aspect of compost is that it is a sustainable product that can be crafted to meet specific project needs. For example, recycled organic material (compost) can be processed for use as a soil amendment, turf top-dressing, mulch, erosion control media etc. It can be further refined to allow for its optimal use as a growing media component, nutrient source, or blended to allow for use in a variety of creative applications. It is important to remember that the characteristics compost possesses, determines the application in which it can best be used.

When it comes to choosing a product that best suits your needs there are a number of questions that you can ask. However, it is also important to know the attributes that define quality compost. These characteristics are highlighted here:

Quality compost.....

...has high levels of organic matter and nutrients.

Organic matter is vital for good soil health and adding quality compost to the soil means that you are adding organic carbon which helps to improve soil condition. Australian soils are generally low in organic carbon - one of the key indicators of soil fertility. Increasing organic carbon by using quality compost improves soil fertility and promotes healthy plant growth. Compost also provides the soil with a range of important nutrients that are essential for plant growth.

...is free from weeds and diseases.

Weeds and diseases are the last thing you want to introduce into your environment and adding quality compost will ensure that your landscape is not at risk. Quality compost has been through a full composting process which involves pasteurisation and microbial transformation for at least 6 weeks. During this professionally managed composting process, temperatures are high enough to disable even the toughest weed seeds. As well as being free of weeds and diseases, quality compost will have a pleasant "earthy" smell.

...has been professionally composted and complies with the Australian Standards.

Quality compost will be produced by quality processors who will be happy to supply you with information and advice about using compost. They will also welcome you to tour their facilities so you can see firsthand where quality compost is made. The Compost for Soils website provides contact information for suppliers of quality compost – companies who are committed to improving industry standards and customer satisfaction.

Why use quality compost?

Using quality compost improves soil structure, fertility and general soil health. Healthy soil is essential for healthy plants and landscapes. Compost can do a lot of the hard work for you by increasing the water holding and nutrient capacity of soil, meaning that less water and fertiliser is required for ongoing maintenance. This can significantly reduce maintenance costs and makes compost a very cost effective option.

As compost can improve soil structure, it can also be used to repair problem soils. Using quality compost on/in the sandy soils of WA will improve soil structure and the water and nutrient holding capacity of the soil. This means that plants have access to both water and nutrients for longer periods of time, ensuring better plant growth. Improved soil structure also helps to prevent soil erosion, as does the addition of quality compost mulch into the landscape. Compost mulch will also help to control weeds; reducing labour costs and the need for extensive use of herbicides.

Talk to your quality compost supplier about the compost products that will best suit your needs.

Where can I find quality compost?

Good suppliers can produce a product that specifically suits your needs and be able to produce it consistently. Your supplier should also be able to supply you with a current analysis of the compost, material safety data sheets

Key benefits of compost:

- increased soil organic matter
- improved soil structure and fertility
- increased water and nutrient holding
- improved drainage and reduced erosion
- easy to use and cost effective

(MSDS) as well as indicating the best way to apply and use their products. Quality processors will encourage you to tour their facilities and see how their compost is processed.

Do you know the right questions to ask?

One way to ensure a composted product is best suited for your needs is to ask the right questions. The following details a list of questions you may want to consider before purchasing a composted product:

Question	Some of the things your compost producer should be able to tell you
What is quality Compost?	Does it have appropriate levels of organic matter and nutrients, is it free from weeds and disease, has it been professionally composted and comply with AS 4454 (or more strict certification)?
What are the needs of my soil?	The product's ability to provide good drainage, added nutrients, increased water retention, stable pH, weed/disease suppression, etc.
What are my application requirements/specifications?	What size grading and other properties are right for your application, e.g. a roadside verge needs to be coarse and heavy to prevent it from blowing or washing away.
What issues can arise from a poor quality compost or inappropriate application of compost?	Phytotoxicity (plant death) from 'immature' compost, nitrogen 'drawdown' (or retention) due to high C:N (N unavailable to plants), presence of residual chemicals, physical contamination (plastics or glass), presence of weeds and disease, incorrect application preventing the compost from working properly (e.g. applied to deep or the in the wrong situation)
How is your compost made?	Why is this compost a 'high quality' product? How confident is the producer that their compost is right for you and why?



An initiative of Compost Australia

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

www.compostforsoil.com.au
the resource for compost users