

COMPOST TIPS

Annual Gardens

For annual flower beds or vegetable patches, try working finished compost into the soil during the spring. Before planting seeds or seedlings, spread 2 inches of compost over the garden area, then till the compost into the soil at a depth of 6 to 8 inches. For large gardens, conserve limited amounts of compost by adding one trowel's worth of finished compost into each planting hole.

Other Compost Uses

Compost nourishes lawns and turf garden paths, provided you don't add so much that it smothers grass seedlings. A light, 1/8-inch sprinkling of screened compost makes an ideal fertilizer during a lawn's spring and fall growth spurts. Before planting a new lawn, work a 2-inch layer of compost into the dirt, then broadcast seed or lay down sod. For container gardening, cut back on expensive potting soil by mixing screened compost with other ingredients. You can try a ratio of two parts screened compost, one part rich garden soil and one part sand or perlite.

How Much Compost Do I Need?

If you have difficulty determining how much compost you need to pick up, base your estimate on average amounts recommended per square foot, such as those suggested in the Rodale encyclopedia. Pick up 200 pounds per 1,000 square feet of garden when thin layers are required, and 400 pounds for deeper layers. The bare minimum of the recommended compost application is 50 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Sifting and Screening

The City has screened the compost in an attempt to remove large pieces of wood waste. Gardeners may want to sift the material to an even smaller size removing small sticks, twigs and rocks. Sifting also aerates the compost, encouraging further decomposition and healthy soil structure. Use sifted compost in garden soil, and finely sifted compost with seed-starting mixtures.

Ideally, the screen should consist of a wood-framed piece of 1/2-inch hardware cloth, and be large enough to fit on top of a wheelbarrow or plastic tub without sliding off. These screens can be purchased at a local hardware store.

Place the sifting screen on top of the wheelbarrow or plastic tub. Lift a shovelful of compost onto the screen. Pick up the screen, and shake or bounce the compost until only the pieces too large to fit through the holes remain on the screen. Remove large items from the top of the screen, such as rocks, sticks and grubs.