

Gaston Grower Spotlight August 2022



Compost and pH Pitfalls

As the spring planted crops have begun to fizzle out of production, we thought it would be important to address a common complaint amongst home growers this summer growing season. That is, "I've spent all of this money to improve my garden and my crops are stunted/not producing".

Why compost leads to complaints

Compost and organic matter have become buzzwords among the gardening community over the past few years. Many popular gardeners are promoting compost due to its many benefits. While adding compost to our clay soils has plenty of benefits, there are few things that must be taken into consideration before investing in large amounts of compost for your garden. Our office has seen numerous unhappy gardeners walk in over

the past few years wondering why their crops aren't producing well or at all. Most of these clients have one thing in common, either planting directly into compost or a massive addition of compost to their garden area. Compost has pH that is typically slightly alkaline (8>pH>7). Many of the samples brought in have had a pH of around 7.5. While some crops may perhaps be able to struggle through a season at that pH many are unable to do so (tomatoes and beans have really struggled). This is one of the reasons it is important not to rely on compost alone in the garden.

Soil & Compost (Doing it Properly)

Our clay soils are actually relatively high in organic matter, we struggle with soil compaction and moisture issues mainly. Compost can be a great addition when it is tilled into a garden or mixed with native soil in a raised bed. Compost will add space for aeration and alleviate some of the issues our soils have. Compost and our soils both have macronutrients and micronutrients available. It is impossible to know what is missing from your system without a soil test for soil, or a [waste analysis for compost](#). Also, many of the nutrients within the compost will not be available within the growing season that it is applied. My advice is to always test both before starting a growing season. If you are looking for a guide to make your own compost check out this [publication by NCSU](#). When it comes to compost it is best used in moderation in most gardening situations.



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