

Composting 101

Composting is an effective way to return organic matter to the soil. Compost:

- Provides nutrients in natural proportions through a slow release
- Adds structure to the soil when added to your garden
- Humus (organic matter), when added back into a garden plot, allows for greater water retention and slow release

What to compost: coffee grounds, vegetable scraps, egg shells, tea leaves, fruit cores and peels

What NOT to compost: dairy, meat products, plastic, weed seeds, dog or cat poo, fruit stickers

Soil Preparation

Notes prepared by Janet Boxwell, a member of the Inuvik Community Greenhouse.

Key points on how to prepare your soil:

- First dig - dig deep and turn over soil for aeration. You don't have to go to bottom (unless you're really ambitious!)
- Water and leave for about a day
- Second dig - shallow (about 1 foot), apply organic fertilizer in root zone, mix
- Water
 - to allow fertilizer to start to dissolve and distribute
 - and to activate natural soil microbes
- Can use a clear plastic sheet or tarp over the plot after watering
 - to reduce evaporation
 - increase heat, to promote germination



In order to grow healthy, nutritious food, we must also consider the importance of growing soil. Soil requires nutrients since it is the medium through which these nutrients reach our plants. Compost is one form of this, but nutrients can also be added in the form of manures and fertilizers. Natural forms of fertilizer include bone meal, blood meal, fish waste, alfalfa meal, seaweed, rock phosphate, and more.

Natural (organic) fertilizer vs. synthetic (chemical) fertilizer:

- Organic fertilizers allow for slow release of nutrients including important trace minerals
- Organic fertilizers promote soil health, won't 'burn' roots or damage soil microbes
- Includes humus (organic matter) that adds structure to soil
- Note: synthetic fertilizer promotes rapid plant growth in short term. But it may weaken plants and damage soil in the long term.

Fertilizers are labeled in a 3-number system. For example, '4-10-2' denotes the percentage of important growth nutrients N, P & K

N- Nitrogen - helps plant foliage to grow strong

P- Phosphorous - helps roots and flowers grow and develop

K- Potassium- important for overall plant health

Ecology North offers more advice on soil health and a recipe for soil. Refer to the booklet provided to learn more.

