



THE COMPOST CONNOISSEUR

Some people's gardens are wonderful—with lush, strong, healthy plantings, very few weeds, deep, manicured edges and dark, rich soil. These gardens really used to irritate me, as no matter how hard I worked, they always looked better than mine and I didn't know why. It was by pure luck that a number of years ago I found the holy grail of gardening, when an older woman who lived next door to me asked if I would like to split a truckload of compost with her. As she was in her 80's and I was in my 20's, I quickly agreed, and said I would spread her half for her as well. So it was that one fateful Saturday morning, a dump truck approximately the size of Cincinnati backed into the driveway and dumped ten (10!) plus yards of steaming soil-like material, which looked like it was on fire and smelled incredibly bad. It was, in fact, mushroom compost, and as you may have guessed, it turned my gardening life around.

Mushroom compost **used** to be cheap. As I remember, in the 70's, a truckload of any size cost \$5.00. Three garbage cans full were \$5.00, ten plastic bags were \$5.00. You get the idea.

Today mushroom compost is approximately the same price as black dirt, but it is still a bargain. It can be used in many of the same ways as black dirt. The secret to success with compost is not to be too conservative in its application. Just as you wouldn't eat only one potato chip, or limit yourself to only one kiss, neither should you limit this elixir.

When you're first starting to use mushroom compost, buy it in bags. Typically these contain about 40 pounds of material. Start small, and you'll see results almost immediately.

For new plantings of annuals or perennials, dig the hole, add up to 50% mushroom compost to the material extracted from the hole, place the plant in the hole and press the mixture in, leaving a nice collar surrounding the plant with the excess.

Container planting can be trickier, but adding 50% mushroom compost to potting soil will help the mixture to retain moisture. Pure potting soil tends to dry out quickly, and amending it with mushroom compost at planting time will mean less time spent watering later.

Top-dressing all areas of the garden is super easy: Just spread a thin layer of this magic compost over plants in **early** spring (March to April) or **late** fall (October to December). Perennial plants will grow right through this layer of love and thrive. You will also notice the worm population will increase many fold in about two to three years. You get free core aeration compliments of the worms, and—the best—FREE worm castings.

During the growing season, mushroom compost can be added to all beds and shaken or sifted to enhance the soil and retain moisture. If you have cracks in the soil, adding mushroom compost is an easy remedy. It is also an excellent mulch material, retaining moisture and looking good.

Mushroom compost can be used on the lawn, too, but fresh mushroom compost is moist, sticky and clumpy. You want the old, dried out stuff your garden center has left over. This is usually easier to acquire in bulk form, as the leftovers tend to dry out. To

rejuvenate your lawn, follow these steps: This can be done any time of the year, but in my experience, fall is the easiest time. and your garden will reap the tremendous benefits of the

* Core aerate. compost connoisseur.

* Spread dried mushroom compost. Finally, mushroom compost will

* Add fertilizer (10-10-10 not change the pH of your soil—

* Then, and only then, secure incorrect use of fertilizers will do a good mulching mower and that. Mushroom compost is not a mower mulch everything two fertilizer, but a soil conditioner times—once in each and breaker upper—in a word, direction. “Iuv” for your soil. Apply mulch