

Compost Tea: A Secret Tool for a Healthy Garden

by Heather Picard

When it comes to creating a healthy, vibrant garden, nutrient rich soil is paramount. Microbes, beneficial bacteria, mycorrhizal fungi, and nematodes all need to be present to create an environment that sustains life. When present in the soil these microscopic creatures are free to go about their business of breaking down organic matter, delivering nutrients to plants and breaking down toxins. Dirt without these elements can grow little to nothing.

Virtually every garden has different soil content and testing samples of the soil can illuminate what components are present. The goal is to create a balance that is not too acidic and not too alkaline. Equally important is to add those microscopic creatures that arise in the decomposition of organic matter. Applying organic compost regularly in a landscape begins the process of percolating those organisms into the earth. Once in the soil, they create an ecosystem upon which plants depend.

Ancient agricultural practices included the use of what we now call “compost tea” to boost the nutrients in soil. Compost tea is a brew made by steeping a small amount of healthy compost in aerated watered for at least 24 hours. The final concoction holds a concentrated dose of nutrients from the compost. Spraying it directly onto plants and soil is like giving a garden a high potency multi-vitamin to strengthen its immune system. Compost tea has been credited for eliminating foliar diseases, managing pests and strengthening the health of plants. It has even been shown to increase the nutritional content and improve the flavor of vegetables. Plants grow faster, bigger and stronger.

Compost tea can be brewed to address specific soil needs. Bacteria-dominated compost tea is the most widely used and easy to make. It is good for applying to soil before growing vegetables and herbs, and is used as a plant spray to address foliar diseases. Fungi-dominated tea is good for mulching around berries and fruit trees.

Contemporary use of widespread fertilizers and pesticides replaced the use of compost tea and other holistic gardening practices. As the world wakes up to the destructive nature of petroleum-based chemicals in our soil, we at Equinox Landscape believe that compost tea may become the wave of the future for landscaping and agriculture. It is easy to make, easy to apply and highly effective. This is why we choose to use it in all the gardens we work in.