



Why Use Compost Tea

Any gardener who has studied organic gardening methods understands the value of adding compost to their soils. Compost provides the raw material that feeds the microbial life in a soil and the microbes in turn convert organic matter into nutrients plants use. Good quality compost will help sustain a wide variety of organisms in the soil. A healthy soil should have many types of bacteria, fungi, protozoa and beneficial nematodes. Unfortunately too many gardeners rely solely on the practice of providing plant nutrients through commercial fertilizers. This practice of spreading granular fertilizer is easy but it does not provide a food source for the soil microorganisms. And granular fertilizer does not help the soil structure, aeration and porosity of the soil like organic matter does. Regular additions of organic matter to soil can also improve the mycorrhizae population around the roots of plants. These fungi help the plants root system absorb water and nutrients more efficiently.

Given all the good things that compost does for a soil then why would we need to do anything else, like brewing compost tea? The answer to that question seems to be that compost tea can provide further benefits to the health of your soil and plants. Many years of thought and observation by soil biologists have noted that when high quality compost is aerated in a solution for a few days with molasses the microbial population of the compost explodes. Since most good microbes like an aerobic environment the great majority of the exploding microbe populations are beneficial to plants. When this solution is poured on the soil around the base of plants or on the leaves of plants the good microbes out-compete the disease causing microbes. Many of the good microbes are also predators of bad microbes devouring large numbers of them reducing the risk of disease. The scientific community is now doing more work to verify these initial findings but the basic premise of these pioneers looks promising. If the initial promise of compost teas holds up it will mean the potential for homeowners to dramatically reduce the amount of fungicide and fertilizers to their landscapes. This can have a positive effect on our water and soil resources. Many gardeners have also been applying large amounts of fungicides and granular fertilizers to their plants and soils for years. This has left the great majority of landscapes with very little good microbial life. It is felt the regular use of compost teas along with applications of organic matter to garden soils can help restore a healthy vibrant population of microbes much more quickly than compost alone.

Possible benefits of Compost Tea:

1. Increase the biomass and species diversity of microbes
2. Increase the numbers of predator organisms
3. Increases the ability of soil to hold nutrients and retain water
4. Reduces fertilizer use and leaching into ground water
5. Reduces salt accumulation in soils
6. Improves the soils pH buffering ability through microbe diversity

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