

Compost Tea

Compost tea is a fermented brew of compost and water that concentrates bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and nematodes into an easily absorbed liquid form. The benefits of use are that it improves the nutrients in the soil and increases mycorrhizal fungi and predatory nematodes populations to help defend plants against a variety of microorganisms.

Compost made mostly from green materials (lawn grass, fresh weeds, vegetable parings) contains beneficial bacteria. Compost made mostly from brown materials (dried leaves and twigs) contains more fungus. Fast-growing veggies and annuals do best with bacteria. Perennials, trees and shrubs prefer more beneficial fungus microbes in their soil.

Brew the tea on a warm day using water that's about 72°F. Set the bucket in a shady spot because strong sunlight can kill microbes.

Compost Tea Recipe

Ingredients: (There are two basic methods of making compost tea, non-aerated and aerated, but the ingredients are the same.)

- Non-chlorinated tap water (enough to fill a 5-gallon pail)
- 2 cups **fully finished** organic compost (it should smell nice!)
- Inoculants
 - 1 tablespoon unsulfured blackstrap molasses
 - 1 tablespoon liquid kelp fertilizer, optional
 - 1 teaspoon liquid fish fertilizer, optional

Supplies:

For non-aerated compost tea:

- A 5-gallon bucket
- Porous fabric, such as a nylon stocking or porous cloth for filtering the compost
- Enough non-chlorinated water to fill the bucket
- A sprayer or plastic watering can

For aerated compost tea, everything above, plus:

- Air pump
- Airstone (aquarium bubbler)

Instructions:

1. Fill the 5-gallon bucket with rain water or unchlorinated water. If you only have chlorinated water, let it sit for 24 hrs.
2. Add the inoculants.
3. Fill the nylon stocking or porous cloth with the compost. Tie with a rope long enough to remain out of the tea.
4. If using an air pump, drop in the airstone and start the air pump.
5. Allow to sit for 24 hrs. Longer is not better, unless the air temperature is below 60°F, then leave it for up to 72 hours.
6. Dilute the tea to at least a ratio of 4 cups to 1 gallon (1:4).
7. Apply tea directly to the soil with a sprayer or watering can.
8. Use the tea within 4 hrs.
9. Repeat bi-weekly.

Similar beneficial teas

1. **Plant tea:** Soaking a plant with nutritious properties in water to extract those nutrients. Common plants used are comfrey and nettle, which can add phosphorus and potassium to the soil.
2. **Manure tea:** This is a mixture of various aged manures soaked in water. This can become very stinky.
3. **Commercial microbial tea:** These are instant tea mixes designed to combat specific plant issues, but they may not have enough microbes for all purposes. However, they are free from bad bacteria.
4. **Compost leachate:** Leachate is created when water leaches through vermicompost (worm compost) or your compost bin and out the bottom. It is not fermented, so it is only valuable for the nutrients it contains, rather than living microbes.