

# 6 things every farmer needs to know about using compost

1. **Compost is microbiologically active.** Much of the benefit from compost use comes from the active microbial populations inherent in the product (just like yogurt and yeast). This activity makes positive contributions to nutrient uptake and resistance to pests and diseases for a wide variety of crops. Rather than feeding plants, compost feeds the soil which, in turn, takes care of the plants. Fumigants and harsh chemicals kill microbial populations and negate one of compost's most desirable benefits. Reduce or avoid these synthetics when using compost. McGill's horticultural specialist is available to assist customers in reducing these inputs to maximize compost's benefits.

2. **Break up hard pan.** Soil preparation is an important first step ... don't skip it! Break up large areas of high compaction by deep plowing and amended with compost before planting.

3. **Control run-off.** Compost is one of the best products you can use to encourage rainwater to stay on your property, reduce erosion and minimize run-off of topsoils and nutrients to rivers and streams where sediment and excess nutrients can negatively impact water quality and aquatic life. As with all such products, do not apply compost in or near any water supply source or any body of water including wells, streams, rivers, and lakes or to any site that is flooded, frozen or snow covered.

4. **Monitor moisture needs.** Compost improves both moisture retention and drainage. If this is your first experience using compost on irrigated crops, monitor ac-

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tual field conditions before making watering decisions. Typically, compost users, especially those growing under controlled conditions like plasticulture or container nurseries, will not have to water as often.

5. [Choose a compost that's right for your cropping needs.](#) McGill produces three grades of compost for farmers:

- ROW CROP COMPOST is a screened product and meets all regulatory requirements for compost production but, as an immature compost, offers a higher N-P-K value. However, it also has an ammonia odor and should be used away from public settings and tilled in conjunction with application. It is our most economical product. For best results, apply several months prior to cropping. Some of our customers stockpile this product on-farm for application later in the season.
- PRODUCE GROWER COMPOST has been cured 6-12 months and double-screened to a 3/4-inch particle size. More stable and with less odor than the Row Crop compost, Produce Grower may be applied within weeks of cropping (but it should be tilled in conjunction with application).
- SOIL BUILDER COMPOST is our finest compost product, reprocessed after curing to render the product fully stable. Triple-screened, it is preferred by growers for plasticulture and container mixes and may be applied at planting or as a side-dressing during the growing season.

6. [Apply according to agronomic loading rates.](#) All compost products should be applied according to agronomic loading rates based on soil samples, product analytical reports, and crop uptake. McGill's horticultural specialist will assist customers in determining application rates for individual fields and crops. Agricultural application rates are generally between 15-35 cubic yards per acre.

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