



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article July 09, 2018

Learn to Make Compost Tea

by Lydia Holley

Henderson County Master Gardener Association (HCMGA) will host Sherri Doss, HCMGA intern and owner of Bluebonnet Worm Farm, Tuesday, July 17, 5:30 p.m., Clint W. Murchison Memorial Library, 121 S. Prairieville, Athens. Doss will present “Compost Tea Making - The Organic Way to Healthier Vegetables, Flowers, Orchards, Vineyards and Lawns”. This presentation is a part of the HCMGA “Learn at the Library” Series, and is free to the public.

Most gardeners have heard about the benefits of using compost. Did you know that you can get the same nutrients from your compost in a liquid form by making compost tea? These nutrients aid plant growth and fruit yield. By adding compost in the form of a tea, you can apply it as a foliar feed or as a liquid fertilizer. Studies have shown that numerous diseases including blights, downy mildew, powdery mildew, grey mold and bacterial spot are suppressed when compost tea is used as a foliar feed.

Compost tea has also been found to be very helpful in plants with calcium or zinc deficiencies. Because of its liquid form, plants quickly absorb the micronutrients found in compost tea, and may be taken up by the roots in as little as one hour.

In the past, a diluted source of nutrients called compost watery extract was made when water was added to compost and allowed to sit for several days. However, compost tea is rarely made that way these days because the mixture turns anaerobic, smelly, and potentially full of harmful bacteria.

Adding oxygen through the use of a bubbler creates an aerobic condition, which allows beneficial microorganisms to grow. This is known as actively aerated compost tea. The goal of a good compost tea is to introduce these active, beneficial microorganisms into your garden.

Since there are so many different compost sources, studies have varied in the number of beneficial bacteria present in compost tea, and have shown a range of outcomes. Making compost tea from your own compost is ideal since you know the sources of that compost.

Additionally, if you have a worm bin for vermicomposting, the liquid that collects at the bottom is called leachate. It can be collected and used as a liquid fertilizer, but is not recommended as a foliar feed.

Because compost teas increase the number of microorganisms, there are some precautions gardeners need to make. Never make a compost tea from manures due to the possibility of E. coli, salmonella or other harmful pathogens. The addition of fruit juices, sugars, fish or kelp is also discouraged. While these additives help promote microbial growth, studies have shown some of the bacteria from these additives may be harmful. The National Organic Standard Board’s compost tea task force calls for a three to four month harvesting restriction on edibles applied with either leachate or compost teas made with additives.

Aerated compost tea applied as a foliar feed is an excellent addition to your arsenal against plant diseases. Doss will take the mystery out of the process of making compost tea during this informative presentation.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit txmg.org/hendersonmg.