

Cool Compost



Show Notes

With the production of commercial compost set to rapidly increase across NSW, the opportunity for growers to take advantage of this nutrient-rich resource is huge.

What is commercial compost?

Commercial compost is made from food and garden organics (FOGO) waste collected from households and businesses. This material is turned into compost at commercial composting facilities.

There are different methods of composting. All speed up the natural decomposition of materials into nutrient-rich organic matter.

Commercial compost is required to meet strict Australian Standards to ensure top quality products for the horticulture industry.

Episode 2: Compost for vegetable growers

When it comes to growing vegetables and other horticulture crops, the health of the soil is vital. So, it's important to put nutrient-rich plant material back into the soil using recycled organics like compost. It improves soil health, structure and water-holding capacity.

In episode 2 of the Cool Compost series, we talk to a vegetable grower who trialled compost made from supermarket food waste. And we hear from industry experts about the growing opportunities for the horticulture industry as food and garden organics waste collection ramps up across NSW.



Courtney McGregor, Sustainability Project Lead, Harris Farm Markets. Photo: EPA.

Superior soil health and crop yield

Through regular application of commercial compost, growers can improve their soil health and create a range of benefits on the farm.

Compost puts organic matter into the soil, adding much-needed nutrients and boosting biological activity. This in turn increases crop yield.

Compost also improves soil structure and water retention, reducing irrigation needs and costs.

Growing a resilient horticulture industry

By adding compost, soils can become more resilient and better able to cope with heavy rainfall, high temperatures and dry times. Better soil health also makes crops more resilient to disease.

A regular program of applying local Australian-made compost can also reduce reliance on imported synthetic fertilisers. This helps protect growers from global events, fertiliser shortages and higher prices.

Creating circular food systems

Returning vital nutrients from food waste back into the soil is all about creating a circular (or closed loop) food and agriculture system.

Compost has other significant environmental and climate benefits too.

When food and garden waste ends up in landfill, it produces methane – a potent greenhouse gas contributing to climate change. So, by using compost on your farm, you are diverting methane-generating food waste from landfill and reducing emissions.

“The opportunity in using compost is that you can have healthier soil. And when you have healthier soil, you have healthier plants.

And that’s something at Harris Farm that we’re really passionate about, because we actually think that’s going to lead to a healthier farming future.”

- Courtney McGregor, Sustainability Project Lead, Harris Farm Markets

Innovative horticulture trial

To test the economic benefits of using compost, the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) funded trials by Applied Horticultural Research on different horticultural enterprises through an Organics Market Development Grant.

This involved several demonstration trials across NSW (including corn, radish, parsley and silverbeet). The most significant benefits observed were an increase in soil health, increase in organic matter and a reduction in fertiliser requirements. There were also small increases in yields across all sites.

Showcase of success: Harris Farm Markets



Damien Lin, vegetable and herb grower, Mangrove Mountain NSW. Photo: EPA.

Damien Lin supplies Harris Farm Markets and other retailers in the Sydney market. As part of the NSW EPA-funded trial, Damien applied custom-made compost produced from food waste supplied by Harris Farm Markets.

The four-month trial saw a 23% increase in parsley height grown in areas with compost (compared to no compost), which allowed Damien to supply Harris Farm Markets with a higher quality and volume of parsley. There was also an increase in nutrients measured in the parsley grown with compost.

What to look for when buying your compost

When choosing your compost, quality is vital. Make sure any compost you buy complies with Australian Standard AS4454 (composts, soil conditioners and mulches) and **NSW Resource Recovery Exemptions**. This ensures your compost is good quality and free from contaminants.

Soil testing is also important, as every soil has different nutrient needs. Compost can be made to suit requirements, so it is best to consult an agronomist who can provide advice on your specific soils.

About the program

The Cool Compost program showcases the results of the NSW EPA Waste Less, Recycle More Organics Market Development Grants program. The information provided in these show notes is based on evidence and results of the grant projects and activities.

More information

To watch the video and listen to the podcast, visit circularag.com.au/compost

Use the Compost Buddy advice tool compostbuddy.com.au

Compliant Compost with MRA mraconsulting.com.au/compliant-compost

The Australia Organics Recycling Association is the peak industry body for compost processors www.aora.org.au

Australian Soil Management case studies australiansoil.com.au/case-studies



Fresh parsley. Photo: EPA.

Applied Horticultural Research case studies ahr.com.au/blog/recycledorganicscompost

Department of Primary Industries - Using compost in macadamia orchards dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/140284/using-compost-in-macadamia-orchards.pdf

AgInnovators: NextGen compost videos youtube.com/user/aginnovators/videos

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