

## Top Dressing Your Lawn With Compost

We all know that adding compost to soil helps to enrich and revitalize it, but did you know that the same thing applies to your lawn?

Top dressing involves spreading a thin layer of compost on the top of your lawn. The compost will gradually work its way into the soil below the grass blades by soil microorganisms and worms. Top dressing adds lower levels of nutrients than fertilizing, but it restores humus, which helps soils use fertilizer more efficiently and adds nutrients that promote growth.

Top dressing improves your lawn by enriching the soil it grows in. The humus adds nutrients to the soil, improves its water-holding ability, and provides nourishment for worms and beneficial microbes, such as bacteria and fungi. Their activity, in turn, converts soil nutrients to a form that the grass roots can absorb. Over time, humus levels in soil are depleted, so it is important to replace humus periodically by top dressing.

The best time to top dress your lawn is before the first frost of fall. The second best time is immediately after the first spring mowing. Never top dress your lawn during the hottest summer months, as the organic materials in the top dressing may burn your lawn. In the Northwest region, where soil humus tends to be depleted very quickly, it is advisable to top dress your lawn once a year.

The best way to top dress is to start by mowing your lawn to a height of 1 inch to allow the compost to settle between the grass blades and to be absorbed quickly. If you have a lot of dead grass, or thatch, rake it up before you top dress. Acquire a sufficient amount of compost for a ½ inch layer over your entire lawn. For each 1,000 square feet, you will need about ¾ cubic yard of compost (a 30 gallon garbage can holds about 4 cubic feet of compost, most contractors' wheelbarrows hold 4 to 6 cubic feet). Dump the compost out on your lawn in small piles, and then smooth it out with a rake. The compost will work its way into the soil and you'll be left with a healthier, more beautiful lawn, with fewer weeds and easier maintenance.