

## **Compost Teas**

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When it comes to improving your garden, it's important to put down a 2- to 4-inch layer of good compost on top of the soil, but when you want immediate, long-lasting results, a true gardener will turn to compost tea.

Compost tea helps control insects, fungus and disease, and is basically just what it sounds like -- compost steeped in a bucket of water.

To make your own compost tea, fill a container half full of compost, then fill the rest of the container with water; let sit five to 10 days, then dilute to 1 part compost liquid to 5 to 10 parts water. To use the mixture as foliar spray, simply pour it through an old nylon stocking or cheesecloth, pour into a spray bottle and apply as needed.

Once you've made the base mixture, you can combine it with different ingredients to create organic insect controls, weed killers or plant pick-me-ups.

For insect control, combine a diluted compost manure tea (made the same way as compost tea, but with manure) with molasses (1 cup molasses per gallon of water) and a slurry of citrus pulp. Apply the mixture to any area you have ants.

For general insect control, simply simmer citrus peels in water until an oily film develops on the water. Add 2 oz. citrus water, 1 Tbsp. molasses and 1 cup compost tea to 1 gallon of water, then use as a foliar spray. This mixture also works great for controlling fleas in your lawn.

For fungal problems, mix 1 cup of the compost tea to 1 gallon of water. Add 2 cloves of crushed garlic and 1/4 cup of liquid seaweed. Simply spray the mixture on your plant's problem areas.

You can use all of the teas every two to three weeks. It's pretty tough to overuse them. In addition, you can add the following to any of the teas I mentioned:

- Apple cider vinegar: Add 2 Tbsp. per gallon of tea to lower the pH in the soil. It also helps plant roots gather nutrients more effectively.
- Hydrogen peroxide: Add 1/4 cup per gallon of tea to enhance microbiotic activity.
- Molasses: Add 2 Tbsp. per gallon of tea to give your plants added energy and feed your soil.
- Garlic: Steep a bulb of garlic in any of the teas to help fight fungus.