

The Most Effective Use of Compost

A different Way of Adding Compost

As we are entering a very hot spell without rain for next two weeks, I'd like to introduce a method of applying compost to the garden bed which is more efficient of using compost particularly in dry spells than applying it horizontally on the surface.

It is even better than if it would have been worked in on the top 5-10 centimetres of the bed.

Preparing a Garden Bed for Sowing or Transplanting Beans

After forking or digging the bed and getting rid of all perennial weed roots (particularly on a neglected old allotment or garden), having created a raised bed, we give the bed a final raking over.

Then we mark the two double rows for runner beans or three rows for bush beans on a bed that is four foot wide (my preferable width of a bed).

Now we take a straight edged garden spade and insert it its full depth vertically along the line and push the soil forward and backward, compacting the sides slightly, creating a V-Ditch along the line.

Then we take our most mature compost (9-12 months) and fill the V-Ditch with the compost using about 1-1 ½ wheelbarrows on a new garden or ¾ - 1 wheelbarrow of compost per 10m² on a more established garden.

In our case we used 2 wheelbarrows as we are on a poor silty clay with a humus content which is around 1.5 - 2%, which is less than half of what we would prefer for a good start for growing vegetables.

The compost in the V-ditches is well watered in and then we rake the dry soil from the rest of the bed over it to conserve the moisture.

Now we can push our Bush bean to a depth of 2 cm and runner beans to 5 cm into the compost, where they will germinate readily.

To speed up germination you can also soak the bean seeds for 10 – 15 minutes in a seed bath made with a tiny pinch of biodynamic oak bark preparation (505) to stimulate seeds to germinate better and grow stronger and healthier.

What is the advantage of applying compost vertically?

- Higher metabolism makes for faster growth

- Roots grow down into compost at bottom of ditch
- Higher water holding capacity and preservation of water around the roots
- By compacting the sides of the ditch the moisture is drawn to the germinating and sensitive seedlings, securing water supply
- It prevents compost from drying out on the surface of bed
- Use only half the compost you would use on top of the bed
- Researched in the 1980s by Russian scientists and shown to increase yield by 20-30%

This method is very useful for sowing root crops and all the salad crops except for brassicas which require the least moisture for germination.

I wish you good luck, experimenting with this method as it has proven very useful, saving a lot of time not having to water the seeds while germinating; even during very dry conditions.

Happy gardening,

Hans-Günther

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