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Farmer finds use for fermenting

By [STEVE BROWN](#)
Capital Press

Scott Olsen, who owns New Earth Farm near Hillsboro, Ore., has been leasing land to growers for the past four years. As a hobby, he got into small-scale composting.

"I do the field prep and tractor work for Abundant Harvest, which has a busy CSA (community-supported agriculture program)," Olsen said. "One of its customers is Bon Appetit (a food-service company). They wanted to recycle their post-consumer waste, so I started composting what they had."

He became overwhelmed by the amount of material, he said. "With traditional, aerobic composting, a ton a week was all I could handle. Plus there was lots of time involved, and it became complicated in the winter."

Last summer, he heard about BokashiCycle and got in touch with Larry Green, the research chemist and physician who developed it.

"I appreciated his science background," Olsen said. "He provided me with answers and independent research."

So in October, Olsen got a couple of dozen 55-gallon drums and started fermenting instead of composting.

"With Bokashi, I scaled up to 2 1/2 tons a week with no problem, and didn't need much more infrastructure," he said. "My space and weatherization requirements didn't need to grow at all."

"With a three-to-four-week turnaround, I can apply material as fast as I get it."

He said it takes about a week to shred the waste material, a week to ferment in the barrels, then two weeks in the ground before planting.

The end product comes in two forms:

* He drains off a liquid tea, which he dilutes 50:1 or 100:1 for fertilizer. "The raw material is more acidic than the plants would like. A lot of it I've been donating to a research project for growing mushrooms. It can also be dumped on perennials, fruit trees and berries."

* The rest of the finished product, he said, is "the consistency of a dense cow pie. It's not real sloppy, but wet and dense." He applies this to the soil at the rate of 1,800 pounds per 100 feet of a 3-foot row. He incorporates the material into the soil with a disc to finish the decomposition.

Olsen said he has seen an increased bottom line with the BokashiCycle process. He's no longer using as much diesel fuel and labor as he used for turning the compost pile five times. He doesn't need to add water. And he hasn't had to supplement by buying compost from off-site.

Other advantages: He doesn't have to worry about the carbon-nitrogen ratio, "and it smells very much like sweet pickles."

Researchers from Portland State University have been evaluating the process, he said, taking tea samples and monitoring the soil before and after application.

"They plan to continue sampling hundreds of rows, gathering more data points," he said.

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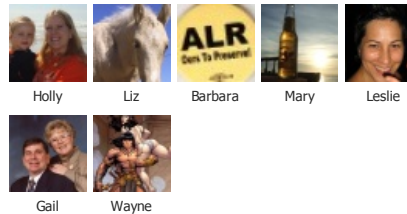


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