

# SOIL AMENDMENT & MULCH FOR GARDENS/FLOWERBEDS

Author: R Alexander (ENVIROS)



Planting Beds dressed with garden waste compost, along Constarry Road in Croy.

Formal Gardens in Burngreen Park treated with garden waste compost

Shrub bed mulched with coarse compost with garden waste compost

**T**he North Lanarkshire Council Community Services, Grounds Management & Estates Department (Community Services Department) has been composting the garden waste it generates during its on-going maintenance practices for the past 4 years. At its Auchenkilns composting site, the Community Services Department processes 800-1,000 cubic metres of parks and garden waste per quarter, using windrow composting process, producing approximately 600-1,200 cubic metres of compost a year. The garden waste is composted for up to 24 months, then oversized material is screened out using a 511 Powerscreen Trommel Screener, creating a dark, peat-like product possessing a pH of approximately 7.5.

The Community Services Department is responsible for maintaining over 100 garden areas throughout North Lanarkshire. Each flowerbed is replanted in the spring and the autumn, using annual plants that are appropriate for that growing season. The majority of garden beds possess heavy, clay-based soils which have required both the addition of organic matter and mechanical cultivation in order to improve their physical properties. Each autumn, a 5cm layer of garden waste compost is applied to the garden beds before planting, and then incorporated by rotovating to

a depth of 15-20 cm. Justin Venton, of the Community Services Department, stated that 'these application rates allow for a more rapid improvement of the soil properties, and replaces soil lost during the plant removal process'. Each spring, the beds are again cultivated prior to planting, but no additional compost is applied. This soil improvement technique has greatly improve soil tilth and workability in the garden beds; working equally well in sandy and clay based soils.

Justin Venton also stated that 'the compost is completely weed-free, which is a great advantage over manure' and that 'the compost has improved the physical structure of the garden bed soils, to such a large degree, that it is easier for our staff to replant each season - so its actually becoming a faster operation'.

The Community Services Department has also has success using unscreened (coarse grade) compost as an amenity mulch on some garden beds. In these beds, a 5-7.5 cm layer of unscreened compost was applied to suppress weed establishment, retain moisture and feed the shrubs. These beds had been growing poorly, and soil conditions were considered hostile. It was estimated by Community Services Department staff, that shrub beds mulched with compost grew twice their typical size and appeared more healthy.

For additional information, contact:

**Remade Scotland:** Drummond House, 3rd Floor, 1 Hill Street, Glasgow, G3 6RN. T: 0141 582 0450 W: [www.remade.org.uk](http://www.remade.org.uk)

**Mr. Justin Venton:** North Lanarkshire Council, Community Services Department, Grounds Maintenance, 14A Garrel Road, Burnside Industrial Estate, Kilsyth, G65 9JX. T: 01236 828150