

THE SUMMATION WEEKLY



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BROWN IS THE NEW GREEN

Everything you need to know on ECJUA's Biosolids Composting Facility and how it is transforming unwanted waste into certified, usable bio-compost called "bloom."

By Dawn Grecko

Residential yard waste is now a sought-after resource that's right in your yard. Leaves, lawn and other plant materials collected by the ECJUA's Sanitation Department are being used in combination with biosolids to create a safe, nutrient-rich and environmentally-friendly product called "bloom."

To use you aren't familiar with "bloom," they are the byproduct of the biological, chemical and mechanical treatment of wastewater. Since many associate human waste with the term wastewater, a common misconception is that "biosolids" refer to human fecal matter.

However, what is closer to truth is that biosolids are bacterial cells grown to treat wastewater. While in the wastewater, these bacteria consume nutrients and organic matter that are beneficial to compost, so when they are separated from the treated water they take all the nutrients with them.

The Emerald Coast bloom, a product that is available for residential and commercial use, contains the "big three" nutrients nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. While bloom is also rich in essential micronutrients like calcium, magnesium, zinc and sulfate, it maintains very low levels of ammonia and heavy metals like cadmium, lead and mercury.

In a better understood composting, it is a biological process in which bacteria and microorganisms decompose organic matter (like dead plants and manure) into an organic soil-like substance called compost. The organic matter is broken down by compost microbes as fast as the materials that you put into it, you might be happy to know the finished product has an earthy scent similar to dirt and mulch.

There are a range of techniques and technologies involved in the process of composting, ranging from a simple compost pile in your backyard to a large-scale commercial operation.

Composting, speaking there are three common ways to compost: hot, windrow, and static pile, and in-couch. Treated wastewater is an elongated compost pile or windrow, which is turned frequently to

provide oxygen, distribute moisture and ensure the adequate decomposition of all materials. An aerated static pile is not turned, but air is still forced through the pile, using fans with fans or blowers, in order to distribute oxygen throughout the pile. Thirdly, in-couch composting involves a large container, or other enclosure, in which the compost is mixed and oxygen is provided.

To create the Emerald Coast bloom, the ECJUA uses a process called modified static aerobic pile (MSAP), which is a hybrid of turned windrows and aerated static pile techniques. Like the turned windrow, material is placed in a window, but what differs in the MSAP process is the placement of an insulator, containing beneficial bacteria and fungus, which is placed on top of the material. On the surface of the insulator, a capillary layer of water is placed to serve as a blanket to both maintain the compost and reduce updraft odors.

As the material grows underneath the capillary layer, it is oxygenated into the windrow much like an aerated static pile, which allows all material to decompose properly. The site is turned twice within 45 days, as opposed to the much more frequent turning typical of windrow techniques. This procedure saves money and continues to keep the site a minimum, since there is no constant turning giving the odors a chance to escape.

So, how does yard waste come into bloom? In order to properly compost biosolids, which are high in moisture and tend to break down with a material high in carbon. Luckily, yard waste is just the ticket. It is an excellent source of carbon, which the ECJUA grinds into mulch before mixing it with the biosolids prior to composting.

Residential and yard waste are mixed in an approximately 3-to-1 ratio for optimal moisture, protein, carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, and temperature. This blend then proves to be a help for the compost process, which helps to decompose both materials (yard waste and biosolids) equally. By composting biosolids and yard waste, ECJUA keeps both out of the landfill—where in benefits to one

"The ECJUA is utilizing yard trash and biosolids to create an environmentally beneficial compost," said Randall Road, ECJUA deputy executive director. "This eliminates the need to landfill yard trash and biosolids, and provides a valuable compost resource to residents and businesses in the ECJUA service area."

By using a biosolids compost alternative, you're helping to protect our wildlife and environment, which includes our water supply. By utilizing Emerald Coast bloom for your landscaping and gardening projects, you're eliminating the need for chemical fertilizers, which can protect our water from contamination by storm-water runoff that carries these harmful chemicals from residential lawns to nearby bodies of water. Compost provides many benefits

well as land reclamation, restoration and remediation.

"You know you may be used anywhere nutrients and organic matter can be used, including for residential purposes, such as maintaining and planting lawns and garden beds, new or established trees and lawns, as well as soil for container plants. Now that you're getting your compost, if you're curious about how to use it, you should know that there are specific instructions for applications included with your package of Emerald Coast bloom. Essentially, compost should be mixed with soil, or another planting medium, when planting for both, containers, or any new plants. Compost can even be applied over existing plants."

In August 2016, the FIFTEEN BEST ECJUA is permit to construct and

2015, but the BCF celebrated its official opening in spring 2016.

Today, the 20-acre BCF composts nutrients and organic matter to be used, including for residential purposes, such as maintaining and planting lawns and garden beds, new or established trees and lawns, as well as soil for container plants. Now that you're getting your compost, if you're curious about how to use it, you should know that there are specific instructions for applications included with your package of Emerald Coast bloom. Essentially, compost should be mixed with soil, or another planting medium, when planting for both, containers, or any new plants. Compost can even be applied over existing plants."

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