

# Seattle Tilth

ORGANIC GARDENING • URBAN ECOLOGY • COMPOSTING • RECYCLING

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## The Compost Conundrum

Liz Katz, *Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline*

You know it's good stuff. You've read it will keep down the weeds and help retain water and nutrients. You probably add it to your garden once a year. But what about when you create a new shrub bed, or plant your tomatoes in containers? Keep two things in mind when you add compost to your garden – it isn't soil and it isn't fertilizer.

### Didn't the plants do fine without compost before we came along?

In a natural ecosystem, the plants and animals are constantly replacing and recycling the organic matter, adding to the soil's tilth, improving drainage, increasing soil moisture retention and creating a very slow release of nutrients. Over years, plants create their own compost. Undisturbed lowland areas in the Puget Sound have up to 3.5 feet of forest duff soil, which has four to six percent organic content.

That top layer of soil was removed to level the ground when housing was built, leaving us with subsoil and without all of the wonderful organic matter. The average organic content of subsoil in our area is less than one percent. Also, it has long been the practice for gardeners to remove leaf litter from their landscapes. In order to replenish this valuable resource, we need to add our own organic matter.

### It isn't soil.

As a beginning gardener, I made the mistake of adding a foot of compost to my parking strip without incorporating it. I installed my drought tolerant plants di-  
*Continued on page 7*

# THE TRAMOR

October 9, doors at 7:30 pm  
Tractor Tavern. [www.tractortavern.com](http://www.tractortavern.com)  
Tickets \$12 advance, \$15 at door  
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tomatoes and keep chickens. **Be there or be square --  
dancing that is!**

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# The Future of Farming



Tilth Producers of Washington's annual conference, "The Future of Farming," will be held November 10–12, 2006 at the Red Lion at the Quay in Vancouver, Washington. The conference will build on three decades of efforts to transform agriculture in Washington State.

Friday's day-long Washington State University Symposium, Farming for Food Quality, will raise awareness of the agricultural factors that influence food quality, including crop genetics and production practices. By providing information that links food quality to specific practices and production systems, food processors, manufacturers, farmers, and consumers can make more informed choices in the ongoing effort to enhance the quality of the American food supply.

Saturday begins with a keynote address, "Bringing the Food Economy Home," by Helena Norberg-Hodge, a leading analyst on the impact of the global economy on cultures and agriculture world wide. She is a cofounder of the International Forum of Globalisation and the founder director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture. Norberg-Hodge will address many aspects of localization, including the key reasons for creating a local farm and food economy, the impact of globalization and Peak Oil, and the cultural effects of the current globalized economy.

Workshops on Saturday afternoon and Sunday include: "Organic Dairy Production" by Andrew Dykstra and John Banson; "Decisions Facing Beginning Farmers" by Colin Barricklow, Genine Bradwin, Mike Peroni; "Agricultural Labor and Sustainability" by Mike Gempler, Maria Cuevas and Rosalinda Guillen; and "Creating a Locally-Based Regional Food System" by Harry MacCormack, among many others.

Tilth Producers of Washington is an independent nonprofit association of organic and sustainable growers, agricultural businesses and researchers. The statewide group promotes ecologically sound, economically viable and socially equitable farming practices that improve the health of Washington's communities and natural environment. The full program and registration details is available online at [www.tilthproducers.org](http://www.tilthproducers.org) or by calling 206 442-7620.

## Transitions

Samantha Maykut stepped down from the Natural Lawn & Garden Staff after the early arrival of daughter Raina. Mother and daughter are doing well, along with father Chris Maykut, owner of Chaco Canyon Café, a frequent donor of snacks for event volunteers.

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Seattle Tilth Association is a non-profit organization and an urban chapter within Tilth's regional network.

### Our Mission Statement

Seattle Tilth inspires and educates people to garden organically, conserve natural resources, and support local food systems in order to cultivate a healthy urban environment and community.

### Board of Directors

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### Office Hours and Phones

Monday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm or by appointment

206 633-0451	Office Phone
206 633-0450	Fax
206 632-1999	Executive Director
206 633-0224	Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline
206 633-0097	Master Composters/Soil Builders
206 633-5045	Volunteer Line

### Website

[www.seattletilth.org](http://www.seattletilth.org)

### Email

Send to [firstname.lastname@seattletilth.org](mailto:firstname.lastname@seattletilth.org)

### Address

Seattle Tilth Association, 4649 Sunnyside Avenue North, Room 120, Seattle, Washington 98103

### Seattle Tilth Newsletter

The Seattle Tilth Newsletter is published by the Seattle Tilth Association. Readers are encouraged to submit articles, ideas for articles, original artwork, and other commentary. All material should be mailed c/o The Newsletter to the address above or e-mailed to [karenluetjen@seattletilth.org](mailto:karenluetjen@seattletilth.org). Submissions will be printed as space allows. Seattle Tilth reserves the right to edit for interest, length, and style.

Design and typesetting by Keala Hagmann.

### Tilth (\tilth\ n

[ME, fr. OE, fr. *tilian* to till]

(bef. 12c) 1 : the quality of cultivated soil

2 : the cultivation of wisdom and the spirit



The entire staff and board met for a full day retreat on Saturday, July 21 in the Pier 56 offices of Mithun Partners, where Tilth VP Craig Skipton (3rd from right) works as a landscape architect. Facilitator Kurt O'Brien, at left, led the group in discussions that will result in a revised strategic plan to be adopted by the end of the year.

## Finding Focus

Neal Thayer, President, Seattle Tilth Board of Directors

"We must reject the idea – well-intentioned, but dead-wrong – that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become 'more like a business.'" Those are the opening words of a monograph by Jim Collins, best selling author of the corporate best-seller *Good to Great*. Using Collins' work, Kurt O'Brien, an organizational consultant with the University of Washington Medical Center has been working with Tilth's

staff and board to explore and define what has made Tilth successful in the past and what will lead us into the future.

Collins' study of organizations that have sustained excellence suggests that such organizations focus on three things: knowing what they're passionate about, doing what they're good at, and getting the resources they need.

Over the summer, the Tilth staff and board have come together to explore these things for Tilth. So far, we've working on uncovering the core purpose of the organization, the 'passion' piece that Collins talks about. This is an effort to name what's present in the organization at its heart, naming it in such a way that we gain clarity of purpose. With a clear statement of the place Tilth has held in the community for nearly 30 years – the purpose we've served – we're prepared to move forward into a successful future. Still a work in progress, we've distilled the purpose of the organization down to something like, "gardening organically because the world depends on it."

For 28 years, Seattle Tilth has played an important role in our community, serving as the city's center of knowledge for organic gardening. The work we're doing with Kurt will prepare us for what look like promising times for Tilth.



## Does your garden tell a story?

Seattle Public Utilities is looking for gardeners to share their inspirational, informative garden stories. Gardens should exemplify organic soil building, water conservation, pesticide-free approaches and other elements that help benefit our environment. Learn more at [www.savingwater.org/outside\\_gardenstories.htm](http://www.savingwater.org/outside_gardenstories.htm)

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### Join the Seattle Tilth Board of Directors

Contact Brandon Pemberton  
at 206 669-1547  
for information  
about board committee work  
and positions.

# Thanks to Harvest Fair Sponsors:



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# Thanks to Our Other Contributors:

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Liza Burke &  
Laura Dahlem

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Laura Niemi,  
Kathy Dang &  
James Morse

**City Chickens Exhibit:**

Angelina Shell

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**Sound:** Pete Covell

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Phil Brooks & Terry  
Wergeland, jazz duo

Zazou, popular French  
Jazz/American  
swing sextet

Opossum Wranglers,  
country swing trio  
Mudcat, swingin' blues  
funk rock

Klez Katz, rockin'  
Klezmer music

Alex Bailey, mandolin  
and guitar

The Tallboys, old time  
swing band

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The decomposition process is making the soil structure more open for plant roots, holding the water for them, making the pH more neutral, and providing a home for the microorganisms that allow plants to grow well.

### And it's not fertilizer.

The soil from our area is very poor in nutrients. Every time it rains some nutrients leach out of our soil and (eventually) into the Sound. The millennia of winter rains have left our area with soil that supports native plants, but which doesn't have enough nutrients for demanding plants like our highly bred vegetables and succulent flowering plants.

When you think about it, it makes sense that the nutrient value of compost is going to depend on what it is made from. It also depends on how it is made and how completely decomposed it is. The typical compost we buy doesn't have the volume of minerals and nutrients most plants require. Cedar Grove compost, for example, has 1.10 percent available nitrogen, 0.40 percent phosphorus and 1.10 percent potassium. In contrast, fish meal, still a natural fertilizer source, may have 10 percent nitrogen, 5 percent phosphorus and 2 percent potassium. Also, compost releases nutrients very slowly, so it not a reliable substitute for fertilizer.

### What it is.

Compost is a soil conditioner that is a fabulous companion to fertilizer. It enables the soil to retain water and nutrients for gradual use by plants. Incorporated in the soil it increases the microbial life that makes those nutrients more available to your plants. Just don't expect compost to provide anchorage for plant roots or the minerals of the other soil components of clay, sand and loam. Call the Natural Lawn & Garden Hotline at 206 633-0224 to request Growing Healthy Soil guide for more information on using compost in your landscape.

*Sources: Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Paul Rosenfeld (UW College of Forest Resources), Steve Solomon, Howard Stenn, David MacDonald (Seattle Public Utilities)*

## The Compost Conundrum

*Continued from page 1*

rectly into the compost. What I didn't realize was that compost continues to break down and must be replaced. After a year or two, the roots of the woody plants in this bed were completely exposed.

When you establish a new planting area, evaluate the type of soil you have

in order to determine how much organic matter to add. You would add more compost to sandy soils than to clay soils. The Hotline has information on how to determine the texture of your soil.

The general soil amendment rate for low-organic soils is to add one to four inches of compost. Remember that the compost keeps decomposing and you are striving for a slow build-up over time.

**Join Seattle Tilth!**

New Member  Renewing Member  New contact information?

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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**Naked Gardener ... is on hiatus**

**Classifieds**

**Cynthia Creasey, real estate agent** specializing in gardens that come with houses in Seattle. Call 206 276-8292, Lake & Co. Real Estate.

**Rain Barrels.** 60 gallon, food clean, fully assembled with brass fittings and removable mesh screen. Available in black, terra cotta and blue. Excellent value, only \$57.50 each (delivery and installation available). Call or e-mail me, Dan Borba, at 253-272-8173, [naturalrainwater@yahoo.com](mailto:naturalrainwater@yahoo.com). Harvesting the rain since 1999.

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**Worm composting on the Eastside?** Red wigglers for sale. Call Judy, 425-868-2694, or email [judy1007@comcast.net](mailto:judy1007@comcast.net).

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Students in Noam Gundle's science classes at Ballard High School made a summer journey to Costa Rica to help promote sustainability, organic and fair trade agriculture and homegrown biodiesel systems. Students built two biodiesel systems before their trip in July. They were welcomed in Costa Rica by Arturo Segura, farmer at Finca Sol Colibri in Santa Maria de Dota, Costa Rica. Segura, a longtime community activist, owns the Seattle-based business Sol Colibri Coffee that is Seattle Tilth's official coffee sponsor in 2006. Segura is cofounder of a Foundation that is protecting Costa Rican forest land from destruction and proceeds of his sales also benefit local farmer's markets. To order Sol Colibri Coffee, see [www.solcolibri.com](http://www.solcolibri.com).

# Seattle Tilth

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## Putting the Garden to Bed

Sun, Oct 22, 11 am–12:30 pm, Bradner Gardens Park

OR Sat, Nov 12, 11 am–12:30 pm, Good Shepherd Center

The rain and dark has snuck up on us and the garden is winding down. Grab those last few days of sunshine and put your garden to bed. Fall is a fantastic time to replenish the soil that has offered you its bounty all year long. Learn inexpensive or free ways to build your soil using materials on hand. Let the Tilth gardeners show you how a little work now will pay off big time next spring. Each clinic costs \$15 for Tilth members, \$18 for non-members. Pre-registration is required.

## Earth Steward Garden Tours

Fun, hands-on garden field trips for school groups in preschool through sixth grade.

Seattle Tilth Children's Gardens, Good Shepherd Center

Sept 19–Nov 3 and Mar 13–June 8. Tuesday–Friday at 10 am or 1 pm.

\$4.50 per child / \$65.00 minimum. Reservations are now being made for Fall 2006 and Spring 2007. Spaces fill quickly. Call soon to reserve a date.

Groups of children engage all their senses through exploration and hands on activities in the garden. We taste herbs and flowers, touch the soft and the prickly, forage in the soil to discover compost critters and allow children to find the unexpected delights of gardening. All tours begin with an introductory activity and two or three other garden "stations." Children learn and practice important garden activities such as making compost, planting, tending and harvesting crops, collecting seeds and other seasonal activities. Visit once or make a series of visits to build on gardening and environmental concepts. For more information, contact Seattle Tilth at 206 633-0451 x2 or [www.seattletilth.org](http://www.seattletilth.org)

## Garden Tour of the Good Shepherd Center

Sat, Oct 7, 10 am–noon

Groundskeeper Gil Schieber will lead a tour featuring some of the 800 species and varieties of trees, shrubs and perennials around the Good Shepherd Center. Since 1985 Gil has interspersed native plants with rare specimens into unique garden rooms surrounding the historic building. A few of the plants you may view are: Eucalyptus, Evergreen Dogwood, Androgenous Butcher's Broom, and many rare climbers. The grounds are maintained without pesticides and little irrigation is used. Advance registration is required for this tour and space is limited, \$8 for Tilth members, \$10 for non-members.

## City Chickens 101

Sat, Nov 11, 10 am–noon, Good Shepherd Ctr Room 140 (Senior Center)

An introduction to chicken husbandry in an urban and suburban setting. You will learn the most important considerations in caring for a

# Seattle Tilth Adopt-a-Program

## Teaching Peace Through Gardening

This grant-funded program teaches disadvantaged children about peace in the context of garden ecology and environmental stewardship. Adopting this program will help us enhance current programming and expand this opportunity to more children from marginalized communities.

\$10 per month - Gloves for 50 kids; seeds, straw and supplies for one session

\$20 per month - Training workshop for 25 adults involved in School Gardens

\$30 per month - Paid teaching internship for 1 5-week session

\$50 per month - 30 forks or spades designated for Teaching Peace; large popup tent for outdoor classroom area

\$85 per month - Underwrite 1 5-week session of Teach Peace



Adopt-a-Program options include Scholarships, programs for adults and children, operations, and the Teaching Peace Through Gardening program. For the full range of options, see our website. To adopt a program, use the form on page 7.

small flock of hens in limited space, including chicken physiology, behavior, health, nutrition, housing and city regulations. This class also covers the wide variety of chicken breeds. Questions are encouraged. You will leave this class with everything you need to know to start raising chickens in your own backyard. Each class costs \$18 for Tilth members, \$22 for non-members. Advance registration and payment is required.