

Compost from industrial compost facilities is a high-value and environmentally-responsible product that offers a high return on investment. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy encourages the use of compost for both public and private sector projects. This fact sheet provides guidance on procuring compost.

BLACK GOLD: COMPOST AND ITS BENEFITS

Compost is sometimes called “black gold” for its ability to enhance soils and support landscaping and land reclamation projects. Adding compost to topsoil brings multiple benefits.

Benefit	Description
Enhances soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides nutrients essential to plant growth, such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, manganese, copper, iron and zinc. These nutrients are slowly released, providing a steady supply of nutrients over time.
Improves soil structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adds texture to sandy soils and helps to break up heavier clay soils.
Reduces erosion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slows rainwater runoff and helps to prevent soils from being washed away.
Reduces water use for irrigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absorbs water and reduces evaporation.
Reduces use of chemicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides nutrients for plant growth, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers. Can be used as a mulch to physically suppress weed growth and reduce the need for herbicides.
Suppresses plant disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases the population of beneficial microorganisms. Increased diversity in soil means that some detrimental microbes are less able to infect plants.
Improves water quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aids in the retention of pollutants from runoff including heavy metals, nitrogen, phosphorus, fuels, greases and oil.
Helps to clean up contaminated soils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports vegetation that may remove soil contaminants, and supports breakdown of contaminants through healthy microbe populations.

USEFUL FOR MANY PURPOSES

Compost can be used for small- and large-scale applications, such as:

- Agricultural production
- Rangeland enhancement and restoration
- Community gardens
- Ecological restoration
- Reforestation
- Mine reclamation
- Contaminated site remediation
- Landscaping for parklands, playgrounds and streetscapes
- Stormwater runoff and erosion control
- Landfill biocovers
- Weed control

Compost Production in British Columbia

In British Columbia, compost produced at industrial composting facilities must comply with the Organic Matter Recycling Regulation (OMRR). This regulation governs the production of compost and the quality of the finished product to meet high environmental standards. It also governs the use of compost while protecting soil quality and water sources. The OMRR recognizes two classes of compost.

- **Class A compost:** Process and quality criteria must meet the requirements set out in the OMRR (Part 3 Division 2), with different criteria for compost depending on whether or not it is produced solely from yard waste and/or untreated and unprocessed wood residuals.
- **Class B compost:** Process and quality criteria must meet the requirements set out in the OMRR (Part 3 Division 3). Class B compost has higher pathogen and metal thresholds compared to Class A and therefore has additional restrictions for its use.

The OMRR does not apply to backyard composting, composting of yard waste if <100 m³ per year, or composting of agricultural by-products that is done in accordance with the Code of Practice for Agricultural Environmental Management (AEMCoP).

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PROCURING COMPOST

Applicable Regulations and Bylaws

The [Organic Matter Recycling Regulation](#) (OMRR) and the [Code of Practice for Agricultural Environmental Management](#) (referred to as AEMCoP) are the provincial regulations governing compost in British Columbia (BC).

In addition to requirements set out under provincial regulations, local governments also have the authority to create bylaws regulating compost use. Compost users need to be familiar with local bylaws that may apply to the production, application or storage of compost.

Proposed Use

Compost varies in composition and quality. Restrictions for its use can depend upon the quality of product and on local government bylaws. For example, Class A compost (see box above) can generally be used without volume restriction, whereas the application of Class B compost is subject to a Land Application Plan (OMRR Part 3 Section 5).

The proposed use will help to determine the quality of compost required. Important questions to consider are:

- What desired results are you trying to achieve? For example, if you are trying to amend soil, you may require greater or lesser fibre content, or specific nutrient concentrations.
- Are there potential risk factors to be avoided? For example, if the product is required for a children's playground, you may wish to specify limits on foreign matter content.
- Will you require expertise from a qualified professional (QP)? For example, if you are using Class B compost, you will need a QP to prepare a Land Application Plan.
- What regulations and bylaws do you need to comply with? For example, application of compost to agricultural land must be done in accordance with the AEMCoP.

Storage

If the material is not going to be immediately applied, storage requirements should be considered. These will vary depending on the class of the compost product, where and when it will be stored, and for how long.

Storage Location	Product	Storage considerations
Non-agricultural land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class A compost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OMRR does not include specifications governing the storage of Class A compost, although users should think about space requirements and the potential for leachate or odour production.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class B compost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OMRR sets out specific storage methods, site location and rainy season provisions for some parts of the province (OMRR Part 4 Division 1).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculturally-produced compost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compost produced on a farm but used in a non-farm location must comply with the OMRR (see rows above).
Agricultural land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class A and Class B compost, agriculturally-produced compost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AEMCoP (Part 5) includes requirements for storing, monitoring and, if necessary, covering the pile.

Land Application

Land application is guided by the quality of compost and where it is applied.

Product	Land application considerations
Class A compost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The OMRR has no volume restrictions on distribution and land application, provided that it does not cause pollution (<i>Environmental Management Act</i> Section 6(4)).
Class B compost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A QP must prepare a Land Application Plan for each site and each occurrence where it is land applied (OMRR Section 5(1)). There are setbacks and restrictions on where Class B compost can be land applied.

If compost is used on a farm, use provisions are regulated under the AEMCoP.

Developing a Request for Bids and Tenders

- Be specific about the intended use and any restrictions on content. The supplier must be able to match the quality of the product to the intended end use. Consider the need to specify:
 - Physical parameters: bulk density, electric conductivity, moisture content, water holding capacity, porosity, grain size
 - Chemical parameters: pH, carbon-to-nitrogen ratio, total organic carbon, total organic matter, total nitrogen, total phosphorus, total potassium, metals concentrations, salinity
 - Biological parameters: pathogen presence and concentrations, microorganisms (bacteria, fungi and actinomycetes) populations and counts
 - Foreign matter content: size and concentration of non-compostable components such as rocks or plastic, restrictions around sharp foreign matter (such as glass or metal shards) that can cause injury
 - Feedstock: what organic matter went into making this compost product
- Note any challenges related to site delivery (access, timing, location, etc.)
- Specify whether delivery is to be included, and when the product is required

Sourcing Suppliers

Sources of information on reliable suppliers will include:

- Your regional district or municipality for local compost sources
- Directories (online or printed) for local gardening, landscaping, horticulture, greenhouse, nursery and/or agriculture supply stores
- An internet search for “compost distributors” and the types of compost available from these distributors
- BC Bid (www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca), an online marketplace where contract opportunities are advertised. BC Bid allows vendors to review opportunities where compost is required for a project, download the related documents and electronically deliver submissions on selected solicitations. This will apply in particular to public sector projects.

Evaluation of Bids and Tenders

As is often the case, the lowest bid is not always the best value. The checklist below provides considerations.

Considerations	Notes
Is the compost sourced from a facility compliant with the OMRR?	
Can the contractor reliably provide the right type of compost for the desired application?	
Can the compost be provided in the quantity and quality needed within an appropriate timeframe?	
Will the contractor provide details of compost (biological, chemical and physical properties/contents) to provide assurance that the product is appropriate for its purpose and safe to use?	
Is the content guaranteed, and how will the guarantee be enforced (e.g., payment on satisfactory completion, inclusion of quality certificate, insurance to cover removal costs in case of a problem)?	
Will the supplier confirm a fixed price and availability if additional product is required?	
What are the costs associated with the product, delivery and installation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is this the best value for the cost, both short-term (upfront costs) and long-term? ○ Will there be a need for reapplication of compost for its intended purpose? 	
What is the track record of the contractor – both the manufacturer and supplier, if they are different? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are they reliable and compliant with all local and provincial regulations? ○ Have any complaints been filed against the contractor by the Better Business Bureau or are there online complaints (or compliments) from other customers? 	
What are the contractor’s overall goals and/or mission statement related to ethical, social and environmental responsibilities? Do these align with the goals and/or mission statements identified by the purchaser organization?	

Questions? Contact env.omrr.reg.reviews@gov.bc.ca or AEMCoPenquiries@gov.bc.ca.

Organic Matter Recycling Regulation and Guidelines

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/waste-management/food-and-organic-waste/regulations-guidelines>

Agricultural Environmental Management

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/waste-management/industrial-waste/agriculture>