

news

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Dean 'the compost guy' Dack understands the complex nature of compost and the value it adds to your garden.

CONSERVATION EFFORT

Compost great for your plants and utilizes water efficiently

Judie Steeves
Contributor

Perhaps you've seen him at your local farmer's market. Dean Dack, 'the compost guy,' might be considered one of your garden's best friends, helping create healthy, WaterWise landscapes in the Okanagan.

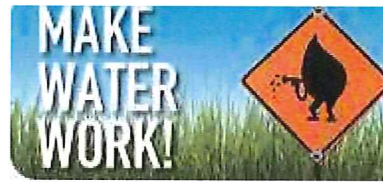
According to Dack of Classic Compost, good soil, containing lots of compost, is the key to growing healthy plants; plants which need less water as a result.

He is passionate about growing healthy lawns and plants and about conserving the valley's precious water resource at the same time.

"People call me up to tell me about the three-pound tomatoes they grew with the help of my compost," he says enthusiastically. "This is a very satisfying job," he adds with a grin.

As he explains it, there are already nutrients in soil, but they are "locked up until a microbe digests it and processes it."

"Those soil citizens eat the carbon and organic matter and then they poop, burp and fart in the soil, and in the process create nutrients that plants can use," he explains with a mischievous smile. "You'd need a microscope to see



all the critters, but there are lots of minerals and nutrients in compost," he adds.

Dack advises lawns should be top dressed with fine compost that isn't high in nitrogen, like synthetic lawn fertilizers are.

"Proper compost feeds the microbes in the soil," he says, and helps the lawn retain moisture so it needs to be watered less often. Besides, he says, an over-watered lawn gets lazy. It doesn't grow deep roots, so all the roots tend to be on the surface of the soil where they quickly dry out in the Okanagan's hot summer sun.

Instead, you should water more deeply, but less often, to encourage the lawn's roots to grow deep, where they are less vulnerable to the summer's heat.

That said, he adds, it's important to know what kind of soil your lawn is grown in. If it's sand, water will just leach right through, and if it's clay, it

will stay too wet, so a combination of sand, clay and compost is ideal.

Adding a compost mulch to lawns and around plants also helps to conserve moisture and prevent evaporation in the heat of summer, helping reduce heat stress on plants and keeping them healthier and less susceptible to insects and disease.

"We should be feeding the soil, instead of fertilizing plants," he explains, adding, "If the plants are healthy there's less disease and they require less water."

Over-fertilizing lawn is also an issue, says Dack. "If you put on too much fertilizer, it's like putting your lawn on steroids and thatch builds up. It's hydrophobic so water can't get through to the root zone of grasses," he explains.

"People need to be educated about soils and how important it is to be water conscious," he says. Communities should also have landscape and

irrigation standards and enforcement of them.

Holding up a handful of rich, dark composted soil, he says, "We have the whole world in our hands and we have to look after it."

With 24 per cent of all Okanagan water used on household lawns and gardens, and less water available per person than anywhere in Canada, valley residents are encouraged to reduce outdoor water use this summer.

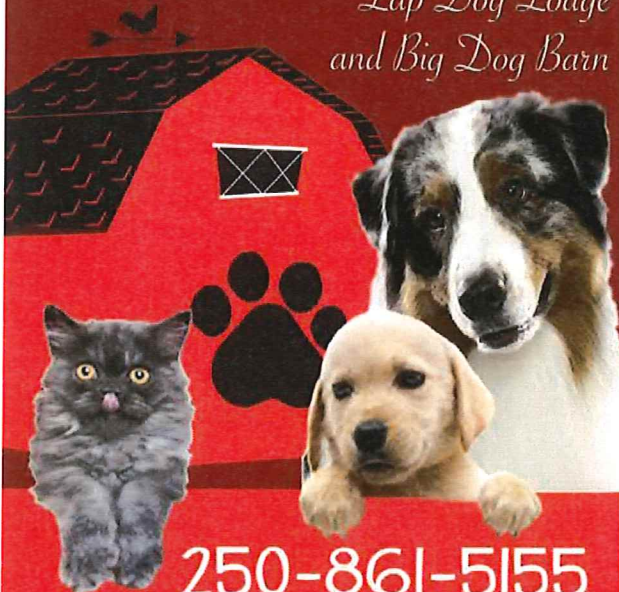
Take the pledge to Make Water Work at HYPERLINK "http://www.MakeWaterWork.ca" www.MakeWaterWork.ca for your chance to win over \$8,000 in prizes, including a Grand Prize of a \$6,000 WaterWise yard upgrade!

Take the pledge to:

- Water plants. Not pavement.
- Water between dusk and dawn.
- Leave lawn 5-8 cm (2-3 inches) tall
- Leave grass clippings as mulch
- Top dress with compost; and
- Change out some lawn for drought-tolerant turf and/or native and low-water variety plants.

Make Water Work is an initiative of the Okanagan Basin Water Board and its Okanagan WaterWise program.

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