

Last week I promised weed and compost information but I really want to tell you about compost tea (nutritious soup for your soil). I'll quickly cover horsetails and Scot's broom. In the meantime if you have weed questions, email gardenmentor@yahoo.com or write to me and I'll try to help. Don't forget, the master gardeners are now on duty throughout the county. Call 337-7157 for clinic locations.

If you're having problems with horsetails nip them in the bud (literally). Get out there and cut down every horsetail sprout you see. Those tiny tips are packed with literally hundreds of thousands of spores of pollen. If you snip off all those tips before they start growing and unfurling you'll be eliminating most of the vegetative process. They'll still send out rhizome-like roots underground, but continue snipping off the tips as they emerge and in a few years your horsetails will send their roots elsewhere. You'll have to dispose of them in your garbage because you can't compost the critters or you'll have them all over your garden. Herbicides rarely control these dang weeds, and you don't want to introduce chemicals into the aquifer.

Scot's broom is another biggy up there on the list of weeds we want to eradicate. If it's a problem in your garden keep pulling it up and cutting it down before it grows poppity pods spewing seeds everywhere. Cut large brooms down leaving a one or two-inch stump. Split the stump to prevent resprouting.

Art Biggert and Sue (Suzy) Cook of Ocean Sky Farms on Bainbridge Island are our resident gurus on the subject of compost tea (and composting). Their farm sells organic produce through a Community Supported Agriculture subscription service. Biggert and Cook's mission statement is "To Observe, Apply and Teach Sustainable agriculture in a suburban setting (OATS)." You'll find Art and Suzy at the Bainbridge Farmers Market every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Art is a board member of the Kitsap County Cooperative Extension Service Board of Advisors, the Kitsap County Conservation District Board of Supervisors and President of the Bainbridge Island Farmers Market Association Board of Directors. Both Art and Suzy are active in appointed citizen committees making recommendations to local governments on issues related to land use, composting and pesticide use. Art also helped develop and still is a presenter for the Master Composting Classes offered through Kitsap County Public Works and Kitsap Cooperative Extension. Last but not least, Art and Suzy received a much-deserved Earth Day Award from the Kitsap County Commissioners last week.

Compost tea is brewed in special compost tea blenders using worm compost (in a "tea bag"), molasses syrup and a mixture of microbes. You can examine these compost tea blenders at the Master Gardener North Demo Garden at Northwest College of Art on Highway 305 (entry is across from the George Family Fireworks Stand) or at Bainbridge Gardens Nursery. Most home gardeners wouldn't purchase a blender for their gardens, but they can certainly benefit from the use of compost tea. Master Gardeners sell the mixture for two dollars a gallon the second Saturday of each month starting at 9 a.m. and Bainbridge Gardens sells the tea mixture daily for five dollars a gallon.

Compost tea must be used within eight to twelve hours. You'll dilute it (one gallon of tea to ten gallons of water) and apply using a sprayer or watering can. The microbial process is slowed during cooler temperatures so the best time to use compost tea is during the growing season. Apply it in early morning on a day that will reach at least sixty degrees. You could apply the tea once in spring and again in fall or even weekly if there is a disease problem. If you enjoy keeping records, keep track of your applications and the results, and forward the information to Art Biggert or the Master Gardeners.

Research in Kitsap County at Ocean Sky Farm, at Ann Lovejoy's Garden School, and by Master Gardeners and other gardeners over the last three years has shown that compost tea applications demonstrated complete arrest and control of many fungal diseases: late blight in tomatoes and potatoes; powdery and downy mildew; anthracnose on beans; and black spot on roses. Compost tea also reduces buttercup infestations and helps

sweeten and enrich clay soils. Garden compost we make ourselves or purchase (such as Cedar Grove) is a fantastic tilth builder but the nutrition provided is a slow and ongoing process. Using compost tea helps all the minute microbes in our soil work busily away to nourish our plants and keep them healthy.

For more compost tea information visit web sites at www.soilsoup.com or www.attra.org. At the attar.org site you'll have to then enter the term "compost tea" in the search engine. You can also contact Dave Peters, Kitsap County Recycling Coordinator, at 337-4898 or email Art and Suzy at Scook21809@aol.com.