

DIG THIS (for 8-04-04) TAGRO Mulch, ©2005

As I write this column it's very hot in the garden. Don't forget to water your plants thoroughly once a week and more often for your containerized plants. One of the ways to help your plants make it through the hot and dry summers we have in the northwest is to use mulches. Chris Smith "Sound Gardener" columnist and I ventured over to Tacoma the other day for a tour of TAGRO to learn about a special kind of mulch.

TAGRO is located on 2201 Portland Avenue, Gate #5, in Tacoma from Exit 134 Northbound I-5 or Exit 135 Southbound I-5. The hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturdays during the months of April through September. October through March the hours are weekdays 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. The phone number is 253-502-2150 and you'll want to visit the website at www.TAGRO.com.

TAGRO mulches start out as Class A biosolids. The biosolids are mixed with fine sand and/or sawdust to make TAGRO mix, TAGRO mulch, and TAGRO potting soils. Each day TAGRO dispenses a total of nine yards free to the first customers to arrive. Prices per yard for the TAGRO products is reasonable anyway and if you bring your own truck they'll load it up and send you happily on the way. TAGRO also delivers to Kitsap County based on distance. Complete analysis of N:P:K are available and Gordy Behnke the guru of TAGRO is happy to give you a tour of the facility. Call to make an appointment or if they have a lull in their day you could get lucky and have an individual tour.

Most gardeners use TAGRO for their lawns and ornamental plantings. The product does not meet organic qualifications because polymers are used to extract water from the biosolids. The biosolids are subjected to very high temperatures to kill any pathogens. The facility has been operating since 1989. Gordy says he began as a truck driver for the Tacoma Solid Waste Division and when the opportunity to develop a way to utilize all the sludge came up he and his co-workers "had only stone knives and chisels and we came up with it all. We're just a bunch of drivers who were given this task and look at it now." They have it all down to a science and gardeners from Pierce, Mason, King, Thurston and Kitsap County flock to TAGRO to obtain the products for their gardening needs.

TAGRO uses alder sawdust in winter and maple and hemlock the rest of the time. No cedar is used. The sand is quarried and screened so gardeners won't get any rocks in the mix. To show how well plants thrive in TAGRO Gordon, also a Pierce County Master Gardener, has a huge vegetable display garden. You'll find onions, squash, pumpkin, tomatoes, peppers and much more. Everyone at the plant helps out in their spare time to harvest the plants. Produce from the garden goes home with employees, customers and is donated to the local foodbanks. TAGRO Mix is ten dollars per yard; TAGRO Mulch is twelve dollars per yard or five dollars for a brown barrel (90gallons/12 cubic feet); and TAGRO Potting Soil is thirty dollars per yard (or five dollar minimum purchase for a green barrel (33 gallons/4 cubic feet).

If you'd like to install or renovate a lawn TAGRO provides an instruction sheet. In renovations one cubic yard of TAGRO Mix covers about 1300 square feet one-quarter inch deep. For new lawns TAGRO recommends one cubic yard for every 324 square feet.

You will want to make your own decisions on whether to use TAGRO in your vegetable garden or not. Many gardeners swear by the product. Gordy and the TAGRO employees can answer any questions you'd have about using TAGRO Mix in your vegetable garden. So far I haven't been tempted to use it on my vegetable garden. The one hesitation I have is as a cancer survivor whose cancer was hormone driven I'm still not convinced that the hormones have been removed or leached out of the TAGRO Mix. I have no scientific basis for this reluctance. However, I would not hesitate to use TAGRO Mulch or TAGRO potting soil on my ornamental plantings.

TAGRO Mulch is aged to have a patina. The mulch is dark and rich, not the brighter orange or red of some bark mulches. I especially liked the look of TAGRO Mulch. It is a finer mulch than most bark mulches and chips. I'm going to try some TAGRO Mulch on my perennial beds. I'll tell you next year how the plants did. I'm pretty sure they'll thrive.

Check out TAGRO's website. Better yet pile a few friends in a truck and head over to see for yourself. Chris Smith and I were quite impressed with the City of Tacoma's TAGRO operation. You might be too.

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