

Spent coffee grounds OK to use in garden soil

Jeff Ishee 7:04 p.m. EST January 24, 2015

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I am often asked about using spent coffee grounds in the garden. Many gardeners are surprised to learn that coffee grounds are a good source of organic matter and plant food. Research indicates that used coffee grounds contain about 1.5 percent nitrogen. There's also a lot of magnesium and potassium, both of which plants really like.

There are several local sources for acquiring grounds in bulk. Just place an empty can by the office coffee machine with a sign "Dump used grounds here." Some restaurants and coffee shops welcome gardeners to pick up spent coffee grounds for their composting bins. Starbucks even has a grass roots initiative called "Grounds for Your Garden" offered at their company-operated retail stores.



Coffee grounds are well-known for their soil-enhancing characteristics, but it has also been observed that coffee grounds are a natural repellent for root maggots. Try incorporating aged grounds into the soil liberally about two weeks before planting in spring. This should help vegetable transplants get off to a good start.

Being naturally acidic in nature, used coffee grounds are beneficial for acid loving plants such as roses, blueberries, and rhododendrons. Composting them with other materials or adding a bit of pulverized limestone or wood ash will help neutralize the acidity level for other plants.

One more added benefit of using coffee grounds in the garden is that earthworms love spent coffee grounds. They will feed on the coffee grounds and in turn aerate and fertilize the soil around your plants.

Other general tips about coffee grounds in the garden include:

- Combined with brown material such as dried grass clippings, leaves, or straw, coffee grounds decompose rapidly, generating heat and thus speeding up the composting process.
- To keep cats from using the garden as a personal powder room, sprinkle used coffee grounds mixed with orange peels around the perimeter of the garden.
- Coffee grounds help absorb moisture and improve the texture and fertility of soil. They have a carbon-nitrogen ration of 20:1.
- Be aware that fresh coffee grounds can burn very tiny transplants, so hold off on using the strong stuff when plants are young. It is always best to compost, or at least age for a few weeks, coffee grounds before using in the garden.

Jeff Ishee has written more than 600 garden columns for the News Leader. Contact him at jeff@onthefarmradio.com

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