

## Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

Gotcha!

That little freeze last Wednesday night got several of the plants that had already started to sprout at my house. Thank goodness I didn't have the tomatoes out in the veggie bed yet or they woulda been compost fodder by now. Whew! I hope you didn't have yours out yet. If you did, you're gonna have to do some hunting to find some more, I betcha. But that freeze was typical; i.e., we usually get our last freeze sometime around St. Patrick's Day—March 17.

Now that stuff is starting to grow again, you may wanna consider using some compost tea on some of them. It's a fairly simple thing to do. Making compost tea is kinda like falling off a log—anybody can do it. The only hard part is finding some kind of a cloth bag to use. We used to use what were called “gunny” sacks, but I'm not sure they're that available any more. Whatever. Use some kind of a cloth or nylon sack that water can go through. Fill the sack with compost—either store-bought or home made—and then suspend the sack in water. You can use anything from a 5-gallon bucket to a 55-gallon barrel. It just takes a little longer in the barrel. Let the mixture set for a 2-3 days and then pour some of the liquid into something clear so that you can see the color. Typically, the mixture gets pretty dark and is too strong to use as is...it would burn the plant. You must thin it out. Make it about the color of iced tea and you'll be OK. That's usually about a 10 to 1 reduction. Feed your plants either by spraying it on the leaves (foliar feeding) or by drenching the soil with it. If you spray it, you may wanna strain it so that it doesn't stop up the sprayer.


What compost tea does for you is it feeds the microbial life forms in the soil which are the same ones that convert minerals in the soil to a form that plants can take up through their root system.

This is also a good time to consider putting in a drip irrigation system in your beds. It's really fairly simple to do if you understand the principles of water flowing through pipes. Drip irrigation works in any kind or size of bed that you may have. There are basically three types of drip irrigation...two of the emitter (dripper) type and the leaky-hose type. The leaky hose is the easiest. All you do is “snake” it around your plants and hook it up to the hose. Let it barely drip for couple of hours and that's it.

The emitter type is a little trickier. You only have to understand the parts; i.e., ¼” hose, tees, elbows, and stoppers. Other than that, all you need is a pair of scissors.

Go to the home improvement center or nursery and buy a roll of plain ¼ in. black irrigation hose, a roll of ¼ in. hose with drippers every 6 or 12 inches, a package of tees, a package of elbows, a package of stoppers for the ends, and a connector to attach the ¼ in. hose to the garden hose.

Depending on where the garden hose goes, cut a piece of the plain 1/4 hose long enough to reach the bed. Push one end into the hose connector and put a tee on the other end. Cut two pieces plain ¼ hose about 18” long and one about 1” long. Attach one end of one of the long ones to one side of the tee and put an elbow in the other end of it. Attach one end of the short piece to the other side of the original tee and put another tee on the other end. Attach the other long piece to this last tee and put an elbow in the end. It should look like this.



To each of the elbows and the tee, attach a piece of the hose with drippers long enough to reach the end of the bed (about 8'.) Put a stopper in the end of each one.

Take a couple of clothes hangers and cut six pieces of wire about 8” long. Bend a hook about ½” long on one end of each. Push it down over the ends of the dripper hoses at each end to anchor them to the ground. That's it. You got yourself a drip system. .

**NEXT WEEK WE'LL TALK ABOUT BUILDING A COMPOST PILE.**

Send your ideas, questions, or comments to: [gardener@gvtc.com](mailto:gardener@gvtc.com)