A golf superintendent

Tells how composting makes free fertilizer

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Practically every golf course has mountains of plant material residue that contains a natural supply of plant food. These piles are moved around to build the pile higher, to accommodate the storage room, and to mix these various waste materials. All this gives a good compost that is practically odorless and provides readily available plant nutrients.

On our golf course/farm site, the pile grew from year to year until many tons accumulated. After 3 years of storage, mixing this material once a year, it is well decomposed. During the winter months, it was spread on a hay-grass field on the farm. The growth of the grass the following spring and summer on the field where this material was spread showed the compost really had some "strength." The grass filled in thicker and taller, and it had a dark green color. It made very good hay.

A new compost pile was formed every year. This gives a pile that is manageable and can be mixed at least once a year. It also provides a new pile every year that is ready to be used.

After using this material the second year with good results, we were curious to know the plant food content and value of the compost. A typical sample was sent to a laboratory for analysis. Note the results in the table:

Some would say the percentage of nitrogen and content of nutrients is too low to give good plant growth response. While we do not have yield data, casual observation was sufficient evidence of the excellent grass growth stimulated by this material.

There are many places where use of this so-called waste material would be valuable.

PLANT NUTRIENT CONTENT OF GRASS CLIPPINGS, THATCH, AND LEAVES AFTER 3 YEARS OF COMPOSTING

		PERCENT	LBS/TON	1st year application (15 tons per acre) TOTAL LBS.	2nd year application (20 tons per acre) TOTAL LBS.
Moisture		29.85	597.0	8,955.0	11,940.0
Mineral matter		45.99	919.8	4,599.0	18,396.0
Nitrogen	N	1.16	23.2	348.0	464.0
Phosphorus	P	.28	5.6	84.0	112.0
Phosphorus as	P_2O_5	.64	12.8	192.0	256.0
Potassium	K	.20	4.0	60.0	80.0
Potassium as	K_2O	.24	4.8	72.0	96.0
Calcium	Ca	.84	16.8	252.0	336.0
As Ca	CaO	1.18	23.5	352.5	470.0
Magnesium	Mg	.24	4.8	72.0	96.0
As Mg	MgO	.40	8.0	120.0	160.0
Sodium	Na	.01	0.2	3.0	4.0