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Selecting composts to improve your turf

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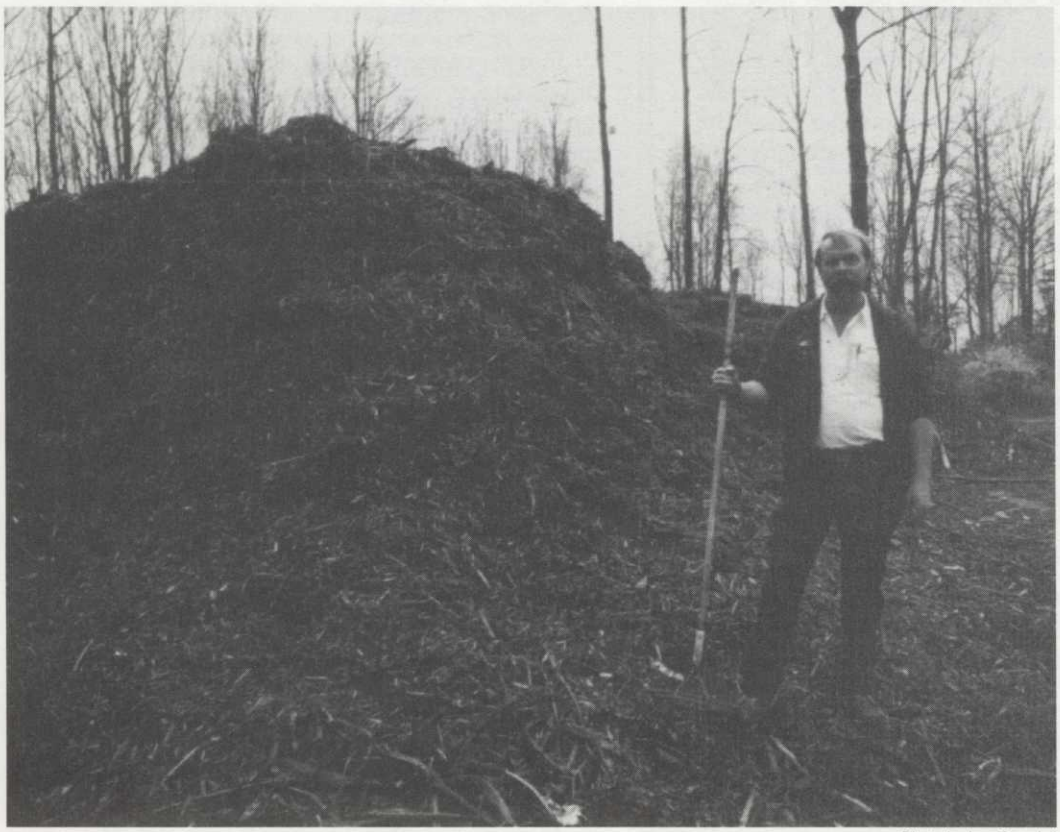

Photo by Les Crandell

Town of Vienna, Virginia, street maintenance worker David Sherwood tends the municipal compost pile.

For landscapers and grounds managers looking for ways to improve marginal or poor soils, compost may be the best deal around. In many cases, compost production sites are located near areas of intensive turf use, providing a readily-available and inexpensive source of organic matter. In many cases, compost is cheaper than topsoil.

Composts are used as soil amendments during turfgrass establishment, as surface applications (topdressing) on established turf, and as low-analysis fertilizers. In clay soils, a good quality compost will increase permeability to air and water, enhance aggregation of soil particles, reduce surface crusting and compaction, and provide plant nutrients. In sandy soils, the organic matter in compost will increase water holding capacity and nutrient retention, supply nutrients and increase microbial activity. The effects of good quality composts on turf include

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