

Builders

get ahead of regulations,
sell houses faster at a higher price point

satisfied customers are spreading the word

Builders, developers, and landscapers are adopting practices that preserve and improve the soil on building sites. Benefits include faster planting and vibrant plant growth for quicker sales, plus better stormwater infiltration. Local governments are beginning to require these practices.

Why build healthy soil?

- More marketable buildings and landscapes
- Better site erosion control
- Reduced need for water and chemicals
- Less stormwater runoff, better water quality, lower costs to comply with new regulations
- Healthy landscapes = satisfied customers

Soil “best management practices” (BMPs) include preserving site topsoil and vegetation where possible, reducing soil compaction, and amending disturbed soils with compost to restore healthy soil functions.

These BMPs will soon be required throughout western Washington. Home buyers are asking for them now.



Learn more at
www.BuildingSoil.org

5 Steps to Building Soil

Washington State's municipal stormwater permits require these soil BMPs. That requirement is taking effect locally as towns and counties around western Washington update their stormwater codes (as required by those permits). Some jurisdictions already require the soil BMPs – all will soon.

The good news is, it's easy, and customers want it. New home buyers say they are happy to pay more for a healthy, easy to care for landscape – and that starts with the soil.

See www.BuildingSoil.org for state and local codes, how-to tips, and more.

step 1

Retain and protect native topsoil and vegetation where practical.

Plan to fence and keep equipment off these protected areas, to prevent compaction. Tree roots are especially sensitive, and trees are expensive to replace.



At Redmond Ridge, Quadrant Homes fences and protects existing forest as an amenity and stormwater filter. Then they grade to 12 inches below finish grade.



The next step is to place rock pads for roads and driveways. Once foundations are in and houses are framed and sided, 14 inches of compost-amended reused soil is placed (to allow for settling to 12-inch finish grade). The compost blend prevents erosion, so work can proceed year-round.

step 2

Loosen compacted subsoil, if needed.

Options where there is hardpan or compaction from construction traffic:

- Scarify subsoil 4 inches deep before placing topsoil
- Rip in the first lift of topsoil, to mix with subsoil
- Rip site soils 12 inches deep, before tilling in compost to 8-inch depth

The goal is to have at least 12 inches of finished uncompacted soil depth, including at least an 8-inch depth of organic-amended topsoil. This will improve both stormwater infiltration and plant growth.



Cat-mounted rippers can break up compaction, or rip in the first lift of imported soil.

On many sites it is more cost effective to till compost into the existing soil.



step 3

Restore soils that are disturbed during construction.

Construction requires land clearing, so plan to restore soil functions for better stormwater management and happier customers.

Three options to restore disturbed soils:

- Stockpile & reuse good quality site topsoil, or
- Till 2-3 inches of compost into poor site soils, or
- Bring in 8 inches of compost-amended topsoil (25-35% compost)

Amended soils may be rolled before turf installation to reduce settling and still retain good porosity for stormwater infiltration and plant growth.

Download the builder's guide at www.BuildingSoil.org.



At Shamrock Heights, Cam West Development combines a traditional feel with innovative stormwater methods. Reuse of high-quality site soils plus mulching support a vibrant landscape.



High Point uses compost-amended landscapes to manage stormwater.

step 4

Mulch landscape beds after planting.

Mulching prevents erosion, conserves moisture, prevents weeds, and gives plants a healthy start. Use coarse bark or wood chips – fine bark can seal the soil.



At Issaquah Highlands, Port Blakely Communities uses compost blankets on slopes and amended soils in landscapes for a high-end, quality product that sells, and attracts future customers too!

step 5

Protect restored soils from erosion and re-compaction.

Prevent runoff from roads or open slopes onto amended soil areas. Compost blankets are an approved erosion control BMP (see www.BuildingSoil.org). Use a compost blanket for erosion control during construction, and then just till in the compost when it's time to landscape.

Once soils have been amended, keep vehicle traffic off to prevent re-compaction. Installing gravel pads for roads and driveways early in the project will help funnel traffic and prevent erosion violations.

Loosened, amended soil is easier to plant in, and provides much better plant survival, preventing expensive call-backs.



Selling healthy soil

– pro’s and home buyers agree on the value

Jim Berger, Construction Manager for Port Blakely Communities at Issaquah Highlands says, “These soil practices work better than anything we’ve tried – plants survive the first winter, and slopes don’t need to be fixed later. Using compost blankets on slopes and compost soil amendments throughout the project not only prevents erosion right away – it gives us great vegetation establishment, even on difficult sites.”

Jeff Cox, ASLA, of Triad Associates confirms, “Placing amended soils or stockpiling topsoils has front-end costs, but there can be long-term savings and benefits, from healthier plant material, better growing medium, and water quality improvements.”

Greg Rabourn, co-host of Yard Talk TV show adds, “Plants aren’t cheap! Replacing them costs time and money. Spending a little on the soil *saves* money on water, plant replacement, and landscape chemicals. And a healthy, vibrant landscape is better for resale value.”

Site planning consultant Howard Stenn notes, “Preserving areas of undisturbed vegetation saves on stormwater detention, landscaping, and development costs. Compost soil amendment makes for quicker planting and faster establishment. There’s no doubt these practices help sell a project.”

Jim Thompson, a Shamrock Heights homeowner says, “It adds value to the home now while we live in it, and for the future when we sell. I think it adds great value to the community too.”



Customers value a healthy, easy-care landscape, and that starts with healthy soil.



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Get ahead of new regulations



Learn more at
www.BuildingSoil.org

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