

Case Study

USING COMPOST FOR URBAN TREE PLANTING

Background information

'Amsterdam Tree Sand' is a speciality sand mix that is increasingly specified for planting trees in urban situations. It offers a range of benefits over normal topsoil in urban tree planting applications as problems can often arise when traditional topsoil or mixes are used.

In order to avoid subsidence of the surrounding paved area when planting trees, the soil needs to be tightly compacted, but compacted topsoil becomes solid in consistency and does not allow for sufficient aeration, irrigation and root growth needed for the tree to thrive. As a result, this can often lead to trees dying, or pavement subsidence where the roots have grown to the surface.

Using tree sand allows for the sand mixture to be compacted sufficiently to support paved surroundings due to the structural consistency and quality of the silica sand granules. It also leaves enough space for drainage, aeration and root growth therefore avoiding

the associated problems. Heicom's 'Amsterdam Tree Sand', which was developed over 20 years ago in Holland by Heicom, the Dutch market leader in speciality sand and soil mixes, consists of approximately 60-70 per cent carefully selected silica sand and approximately 30-40 per cent compost, which is produced from garden cuttings and trimmings. Compost is used within the sand mix to add nutritional value, increase aeration, and improve drainage and water holding capacity. All these elements provide an enhanced rooting environment, which allows the trees to thrive.

In the past, peat would have been used to provide these nutrients, but this has been replaced by a more sustainable resource – compost – from Jack Moody Ltd and Waste Recycling Group Ltd, fully certified suppliers on the Composting Association's certification scheme.



Key Facts

Compost adds organic matter to the soil which gives it a more workable structure and is especially beneficial for clay soils.

Compost contains slow-release nitrogen, phosphate and sulphur, good amounts of potash plus smaller but useful amounts of magnesium, calcium and trace elements - all of which help to improve the availability of nutrients for plant growth. It also includes beneficial micro-organisms that contribute to a healthy soil in terms of an improved nutrient cycle and plant disease suppression.

Different particle size grades of compost are available for a range of landscaping operations. Finer grades can be mixed in to act as a soil improver or a top dressing. Coarser, woodier fractions are most suitable to act as a stable, effective and long-lasting mulch.

Each year Heicom UK uses thousands of tonnes of quality compost to produce their sand mix. In a recent project for Sage Plc's headquarters in the North East, Heicom used 275 tonnes of tree sand to plant 400 trees. This use of compost is set to increase over the coming months as Heicom launches a new product – manufactured tree soil – that consists of over 50 per cent compost, a higher content than used in tree sand. The aim is to create a consistent high quality growing medium for trees in unpaved urban areas with poor soil conditions.

Using compost as part of their tree sand and soil production, rather than non-organic alternatives, was the only option Heicom UK considered because it offered an environmentally sustainable way to add nutrients to the sand without causing any negative side effects. The use of compost in the tree sand also helps suppress disease and increases the sand's water retention, all of which help to ensure the tree's survival.



Comment

Deric Newman, Civic Trees.

"I have satisfactorily used Heicom's 'Amsterdam Tree Sand' in a number of jobs where the trees had to be planted in paved urban situations. I have no doubt that this product meets the criteria expected of it as a growing medium in what would otherwise be difficult conditions. Its structural nature allows aeration and drainage to function effectively. Also it still allows for root growth after compaction and will offer support to the surrounding paved area to resist subsidence."

Mike Queree, Heicom UK.

"We have been really pleased with the results the compost achieves and this can only be obtained with the high quality and strict specification of our suppliers, Jack Moody Ltd and Waste Recycling Group. Our new tree soil uses even more compost to give a high quality growing media for planting trees and we are one of the only producers of this product in the UK."

Peter Van Oekel, van den Berk nurseries.

"In the last five years, we have seen increased awareness amongst landscapers of the benefits of using 'Amsterdam Tree Sand', which has led to a greater use of the product in tree planting and we now see a lot of landscape architects specifying 'Amsterdam Tree Sand' when they are working on urban tree planting projects. We have also found that compost from certified suppliers will not cause tree sand to become anaerobic."

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