

GROWERTALKS

Features

3/26/2014

Boosting the Root Zone

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Magic Dirt

Ted Sniegocki and Bob Joblin, partners in the renewable energy development company Cenergy, came upon an interesting byproduct during the capture of methane gas from dairy and farm wastes: a clean, fluffy and nutrient-rich (1.15-0.30-0.35) fiber.

This fiber remains after the wastes have been heat treated for 20 days in a patented Two-Stage Mixed Plug Flow digester. Needing to find a use for the byproduct, Ted and Bob added a few other natural ingredients to create a certified premium potting soil called Magic Dirt.

“Because of its porosity, it’s a sustainable alternative to peat moss,” says Bob. “It doesn’t have vermiculite, perlite and some of those other additives, which aren’t sustainable, either. It’s also 100% organic.”

Adds Ted: “Magic Dirt has a unique story in that it helps clean up the environment, it’s 100% sustainable and even more important from the consumer’s standpoint is that it actually works.” Magic Dirt, which contains no imported products, is currently available in the Northwest. www.magic-dirt.com



Organic Mechanics

The Pennsylvania-based soils company is launching themselves into fertilizer products with something they are calling FUHGEDDABOUT! Root Zone Feeder Packs. Essentially a giant tea bag, these packs are meant to be added into the bottom of a planting hole, with the plant’s root ball laid directly above. In the tea bag

are a 4-2-2 fertilizer, mycorrhizae, biochar, azomite and micronized oyster shells in a ratio that maximizes plant growth and health. There’s no measuring and mixing—just throw one bag per plant into a container or in-ground hole and “forget about it” for four weeks. These root zone feeder packs are produced in conjunction with Sustane Natural Fertilizer.

Also new is the Organic Mechanics Pure Rice Hulls, 2 cu. ft. bags of just rice hulls to be used as an earth-friendly substitute for perlite or vermiculite. “We’ve been using rice hulls in our container blend since 2009,” says founder and president Mark Highland. “We thought why not offer it to gardeners so they can lighten their soil?” www.organicmechanicsoil.com



Dr. Earth

Specializing in enhancing the biology of the soil, last year, Dr. Earth released a line of liquid fertilizers to complement its dry organic fertilizers, soil amendments and botanical insecticides.

“What makes these liquid fertilizers a must-have for garden retailers is that they are incredibly easy to use,” says Milo Shammass, founder and formulator of Dr. Earth. With growing organically so mainstream today, you can’t expect organic gardeners to take on large and labor-intensive projects involving working dry fertilizers and compost into the soils, Milo explains.

“You can’t treat the organic customers as fringe consumers anymore,” he says. “These are intelligent people who want to do the right thing, but it’s got to be easy. We’ve taken these great technologies and have made them incredibly easy to use. Depending on what products they use, they can have an eight to 12 minute experience with any one of these fertilizers, fertilize their entire garden and they are good to go for three to four weeks.” www.drearth.net



Espoma

Espoma encourages home gardeners to use Organic Bio-tone Starter Plus in conjunction with their All-Purpose Garden Soil at the time of planting. Using these products combined helps to ensure the gardener’s success by improving the soil structure while providing critically needed microbes to the root zone. Bio-tone also adds endo- and ecto-mycorrhizae to the soil, promoting faster root development. www.espoma.com

Selling Soil Amendments Effectively

Mark Highland, founder and president of Organic Mechanics, says selling soil amendments effectively is all about the merchandising. “Put together a small raised bed with a checklist of eight bags of the product, a raised bed kit and however many vegetable plants,” Mark says. “It’s like Merchandising 101. Everything the customer needs for doing that raised bed is in one spot, even if they don’t buy it all in one day. Having all the like items in one spot is what really sells it. The soil amendments are a crucial part. It’s an opportunity to move more product.”

Ted and Bob of Cenergy know point-of-purchase presentation is vital to the sale of any product, and because of that, they spent two years developing the design of the Magic Dirt bag.

“We tried to come up with a marketing aspect for the label that would show people what this product could do,” Bob says. “We put the soil’s certifications up front, as well as the green messaging.” The Magic Dirt bag has no printing along the edges of the bag so people can see the product and the bag itself is recyclable.

They also believe employee training is key, so they go into retail settings to train employees on the Magic Dirt product.

“When somebody understands the story behind it, to me that’s the real sizzle,” says Ted. “If you have a salesperson out there that knows this, it’s going to help the sale of the product and it’ll probably make a better shopping experience for the customer.”

Dr. Earth “kit brands” or color codes their products across soils, dry fertilizers, liquid fertilizers and insecticides. For example, Dr. Earth has a soil, dry fertilizer, liquid fertilizer and insecticide for roses and flowers, all of which have red highlights on their packaging.

“The retailer takes all these red-colored different category products and puts them right in with the roses,” says Milo. “We can take a \$29 rose bush sale and bump that up to close to \$90 with the soil, the nutrients and the insect controls. A good retailer will group all of these and put them together in front of the plants.” **GP**