



Compost for flowers – a case study from Bilpin Blossom Farm, Bilpin, NSW

Who

Phil Miscuso, Bilpin Blossom Farm

Where

Bilpin, New South Wales

What

Cut flowers

Aims

- reduce weeds
- reduce herbicide applications
- reduce synthetic fertiliser use

Outcomes

- cost of weed control reduced from \$10,000 to \$2,000 per year
- less herbicide spraying
- improved plant health
- better soil moisture retention
- improved soil health
- reduced synthetic fertiliser use

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“Mulching has increased the health of our plants and our soils”

Phil Miscuso, Bilpin Blossom Farm

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Bilpin Blossom Farm

Bilpin Blossom Farm is located less than an hour’s drive north-west of Sydney in the Blue Mountains. With around 10 acres under cultivation, Bilpin Blossom Farm grows a range of cut flowers and ornamentals including delphiniums, crab apples, peach blossoms, hydrangeas, gardenias and hellebores. Approximately three quarters of their flowers are cut from perennial plants, while the remainder are sourced from annuals.



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“We’ve reduced our weed management costs from \$10,000 a year to just \$2,000”

Phil Miscuso, Bilpin Blossom Farm

Why compost?

Owner and manager of Bilpin Blossom Farm, Phil Miscuso, has spent years fighting an expensive battle with weeds. Managing weeds was costing around \$10,000 a year and the constant regime of herbicide spraying was detrimental to the plants and soil. Phil thought that there had to be a better way of controlling weeds, so when Darren Fahey, Compost for Soils NSW Market and Industry Development Officer, suggested compost mulch he was keen to give it a try. Phil also wanted to reduce synthetic fertiliser use and improve soil health by adding organic matter.

Compost application

Bilpin Blossom Farm has trialled compost mulch for the last five years. The mulch is applied to the surface of plant beds at a depth of 10cm over the dripper lines, as well as in the aisles between beds. They run a continuous mulch program. This means that mulch is applied to different areas of the farm each year so that each area receives an application every two to three years. Bilpin Blossom Farm buys approximately 80–100m³ of mulch each year for around \$3,000.

The type of mulch used at Bilpin Blossom Farm depends on availability and price. When cheap sources of raw mulch are available they will sometimes apply it, but always in conjunction with lime and nitrogen to help the mulch breakdown. While improvements in plant health are more sporadic with raw mulch compared to the consistent responses they see with compost mulch, the raw mulch still adds valuable organic matter to the soil. Bilpin Blossom Farm use only compost mulch in areas where plants are establishing as they see greater benefits for young plants in the more stable compost products.



The bottom line...

Phil is 100% convinced of the multiple benefits of mulch, many of which he saw straight away. He's gone from spending \$10,000 a year on managing weeds to just \$2,000. Even when the cost of spreading mulch is added to the price of the product, Bilpin Blossom Farm still comes out in front using compost mulch.

Soil health, soil structure and earthworm numbers have improved and as a result, the soil is holding more water and they are saving money by irrigating less. Other benefits have been more difficult to measure, but Phil has noticed that flower stalks are longer, thicker and greener. Their plants are less stressed as less herbicide is applied.

The increased level of organic matter in the soil means that Bilpin Blossom Farm can rely mainly on organic products for nutrition and to help unlock nutrients in the soil. As a result, they are using less synthetic fertilisers and saving money. The multiple benefits Bilpin Blossom Farm receive from using mulch have far outweighed the costs.

Raw, pasteurised or compost mulch - do you know the difference?

Raw Mulch

Raw mulch has not been treated in any way either through composting or pasteurising. Raw mulch will continue to breakdown after it is applied to soil and this means that the effects of raw mulch can be less predictable. Raw mulches can also contain pathogens or weed seeds.

Pasteurised mulch

Pasteurised materials have been processed to kill plant and animal pathogens as well as weed propagules/seeds. This generally occurs at temperatures higher than 55°C.

Compost mulch

Compost materials are pasteurised and microbially transformed for not less than 6 weeks. Compost materials contain no weed seeds or pathogens and this is a matured, stabilised product.

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"We're irrigating less and using less synthetic fertilisers"
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Phil Miscuso, Bilpin Blossom Farm
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For more information on the program contact:



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