

Fertilizing *with* Fish

By Laura McLean
From the Ground Up



Bob Tinay sprays Organic Gem on the gardens, lawns and trees and even the compost pile at his Dartmouth home. The product, made from fish here in New Bedford, has won awards for its benign ecological properties.

Traditionally, agriculture has relied heavily on seaweed as a fertilizer.

The lush pastures of Normandy fertilized with seaweed, produce the biggest cream yield. Brie, ummm. Camerbert, ummm.

And even plain old potatoes benefit from seaweed, as a man wrote recently to tell me. For years he's collected a mixture of eelgrass, salt hay and seaweed from the West Island shoreline and marshes of Fairhaven to line his potato bed, unwashed and straight from the sea.

Along the same principle, fish has been a beneficial additive to the garden. First used by Native Americans to produce healthier crops, it reigns as a popular organic means of fertilizing gardens today.

I have been known to bury the remains of my husband's kippers where the smell could be contained and the inedible portions of the fish decay. But it would take too many meals of kippers to adequately fertilize my garden.

Fortunately, modern science produced a liquid version, which seems to get better and better. I wrote some time ago about Organic gem, a product made here in New Bedford by

Advanced Marine Technologies. The company has won awards from the state and region for its contributions in the area of sustainability, by converting fish (cape shark) that clog our waste stream into a marketable product.

I'd heard about the product's ability to rebuild soils, bolster plant growth and offer higher production yields. Its controlled cold enzyme process has been found to promote the growth of bacteria and other organisms as well as providing supplementary nutrients endowing it "bioremediating" qualities.

I'd read the long list of reasons why one should use the product. It's totally organic. Rather than running off, its nitrogen content is locked in when applied, due to the oils and collagens in the product. It contains more than 30 trace minerals and elements. It repels deer, but doesn't harm groundwater or burn plants. It's odorless. Composting is accelerated by elevated microbial activity. It's caused an upturn in bioactivity in soils where applied. Backing this up is documentation by university studies and scientific data that includes such things as infrared aerial photography.



The gardens surrounding Bob and Debbie Tinay's South Dartmouth home are bursting with healthy greenery and blooms and earthworms, too, which they credit to the benefits of Organic Gem.

I'd learned that the users of Organic Gem range from California grape growers to golf clubs to top-notch nurseries. Potato growers in Preque Isle, Maine, and farmers who grow hops for Budweiser use it, not to mention nearby Ocean Spray. It's even marketed abroad to users in Europe, Israel and China.

I wondered if this plant food could do the same for the ordinary home garden. So I went to South Dartmouth to see Debbie and Bob Tinay's gardens at their home off Rock O'Dundee Road. The couple have used only Organic Gem since installing the gardens in 1999.

Their cascading landscape – from the border gardens to the specimen trees to the tomatoes dangling from sturdy stalks – certainly exuded good health. They cited the fast growth of shrubs and young trees including Leyland Cypresses that flank one side of the back lawn. And they showed me the well-shaped Andromeda and espaliered Cotoneaster that hand-somely set off the front entrance.

Their lawn is thick and green and unspoiled by weeds, due to significant root structure and a healthy soil food web that competes with weed growth. Deer and grubs seem to stay away while earthworms proliferate. All of these good things they attribute to Organic Gem.

“We don't need a sprinkler system like all our neighbors,” Bob said. “See the difference? Having a healthy soil means plants that are less stressed.”

You can almost feel the microbes at work walking their garden.

“We really noticed it when we were weeding our beds in March and April last year,” Bob said.

“The soil was warm where it would normally be cold at that time of the year. Our compost pile actually steamed in the spring,” added Debbie.

These frost-proofing effects result in a longer and better gardening season and “unbelievable” volume of crops.

It all boils down to biology. As company founder and chief science officer Lewis Spencer

explained, “Enzymes regulate all of our bodily functions. We’re discovering in medicine how important enzymes are the catalyst to chemical reactions.”

His product uses a unique enzymatic cold process that produces a hyper-active bio-stimulant different from anything on the market. Feeding organic matter to the soil results in nutrients being fed to the plants. And one of the wonders of Organic Gem is that you can’t put on too much.

“It self-adjusts to let the plant take in what it needs,” says Mr. Spencer.

And that folks, in no fish story.

(Organic Gem is now available in a shake and spray bottle. The product is sold locally at the C & V Variety in Dartmouth, Haskell’s, Avant Garden, Ann and Hope Garden Center and True Value Hardware.)

Quote of the Day

“Almost every book on gardening matters opens with a reminder that the soil is alive and then proceeds with instructions for keeping it vital.”

- from “Dear Mr. Jefferson, Letters from a Nantucket Gardener” by Laura Simon

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