

Pre-Brew Checklist

Compiled by Stephanie Bartel during SARE research project. This checklist contains useful notes to bring into the field when first working with compost tea. A basic understanding/introduction to the brewing process is necessary to acquire before using this checklist.

- Warm up your water to ambient temperature before starting to brew.
- Brew at the same temp as the weather is, so the active microbes are the ones that will survive when put out on the plants.
- Brew up to 48 hours or more if cold. Good tea should have (per field) 1 fungal hyphae strand, 1000 bacteria, and 1 protozoa. 1 Nematode per slide is a plus!
- Dilute foods in some water before adding to brew tank, because they contain preservatives that need to be diluted so they don't kill the microbes.
- Making a tea:
 - Step 1: extract the organisms from the compost surface. They are glued tightly to the food source, so water must be aggressively moving through the compost bag. Not gentle; adjust aeration valve until water looks like it's moving at a "rolling boil". Pre-massage the compost bag to extract most of the organisms by hand before starting brewer. This should make the water brown if the compost had good fungi being extracted. Extraction in the brewer takes about 5 hours, not more. Remove the bag for the rest of the brew.
 - Brew at ambient temperatures, to activate organisms that will survive when they are put out on the plants. They are the ones that will immediately put glues out on the plant surfaces to create protection.
 - Usually 24 hours at 72F, 18 hours at 85F, 36 hrs at 50F, and 48 at 40F. Put a little less food when hot and a little more food when cold. Test periodically to determine microbe progress.
- You can put compost from the tea brewer bag back into your pile. The organic matter is still all there, and microorganisms from the pile will spread onto the material again.
- Compost Extract: Hard, deep 30 second massage of compost in the water (in the mesh bag). This releases most of the microbes into the water. Can use an extract as a soil drench, no brewing necessary. For foliar feeding/protection, use brewed tea to get the microbes active and able to stick quickly to the foliage.