

## Soil contaminant testing offered to food growing households in the west shore

by Sophia Romanchuk  
for West Shore Voice News

● **The Compost Education Centre**, in Victoria is a non-profit organization which celebrated its 25th year anniversary last year. With an overall mandate of providing composting and ecological gardening education to residents in the Greater Victoria area, it is a gardening and compost haven for gardeners at all stages of experience.

The Centre runs educational workshops in schools across the districts from Victoria to the Cowichan Valley, as well as classes for the public, and organic plant sales year-round. Their bread and butter is small-scale backyard composting.

Many are preparing to begin planting their gardens, and CEC executive director Marika Smith says that the most important thing to know is how to “grow you soil before you grow your food”. Most of the commonly asked questions heard at CEC are around how to compost in backyards and in apartments.

“The best soil amendment is your own compost,” says Smith. But as there are few regulations on commercial compost it’s difficult to know its quality. Producing compost takes time, and it can’t be sped up although a greater volume of compost material can help create heat which can help speed up the decomposition process, but ultimately, it will still take time.

If you live in an apartment or have a small townhome patio, worm composting bins are a great alternative to look into for supplementing your balcony gardens.

Applying compost to your garden every season will produce increasingly healthier soil, which in turn supports better garden growth. Most often when a garden doesn’t flourish, poor soil quality is to blame.

Basic soil nutrient analysis is available at CEC by donation. Soil contaminant testing can be pricey but is

also recommended.



Sophia Romanchuk - West Shore Voice News

## Free soil tests for gardeners



These tests will look for **CONTAMINANTS**

2018: View Royal, Colwood, Langford

Applications open to March 27:

[www.compost.bc.ca/healing-city-soils/](http://www.compost.bc.ca/healing-city-soils/)

<< **Rotating-style compost bin is demonstrated at the Compost Education Centre.** Composting goals are to breed beneficial bacteria, fungi and other microbes that work in the soil to make nutrients readily available to plants. As well, compost creates a full-spectrum nutrient and mineral resource to enrich garden soil.

Now in its third year, CEC’s Healing City Soils (partnered with Royal Roads University) is reaching out in 2018 to Colwood, Langford, and View Royal.

The program is creating a region-wide soil quality map by collecting and analyzing 100 soil samples for contaminants each year. Sampling sites are volunteered by homeowners who are intending to grow food. Testing runs from mid-March til mid-May.

It’s a way to receive a normally costly soil contaminant analysis for free. Results are confidential. Soil remediation info and followup workshops are available. Applications available to March 27 at [www.compost.bc.ca/healing-city-soils/](http://www.compost.bc.ca/healing-city-soils/)

Upcoming workshops include Backyard Rainwater Management March 24, and Composting Basics April 7. Fact sheets, workshops, and info can be found online: [www.compost.bc.ca](http://www.compost.bc.ca) **WSV**