

## Specification of Soils for Biotreatment or Bioretention Facilities

Soils for biotreatment or bioretention areas shall meet two objectives:

- Be sufficiently permeable to infiltrate runoff at a minimum rate of 5" per hour during the life of the facility, and
- Have sufficient moisture retention to support healthy vegetation.

Achieving both objectives with an engineered soil mix requires careful specification of soil gradations and a substantial component of organic material (typically compost).

Local soil products suppliers have expressed interest in developing 'brand-name' mixes that meet these specifications. At their sole discretion, municipal construction inspectors may choose to accept test results and certification for a 'brand-name' mix from a soil supplier.

Tests must be conducted within 120 days prior to the delivery date of the bioretention soil to the project site.

Batch-specific test results and certification shall be required for projects installing more than 100 cubic yards of bioretention soil.

### SOIL SPECIFICATIONS

Bioretention soils shall meet the following criteria. "Applicant" refers to the entity proposing the soil mixture for approval by a Permittee.

1. General Requirements – Bioretention soil shall:
  - a. Achieve a long-term, in-place infiltration rate of at least 5 inches per hour.
  - b. Support vigorous plant growth.
  - c. Consist of the following mixture of fine sand and compost, measured on a volume basis:
    - 60%-70% Sand
    - 30%-40% Compost
2. Submittal Requirements – The applicant shall submit to the Permittee for approval:
  - a. A minimum one-gallon size sample of mixed bioretention soil.
  - b. Certification from the soil supplier or an accredited laboratory that the Bioretention Soil meets the requirements of this guideline specification.
  - c. Grain size analysis results of the fine sand component performed in accordance with ASTM D 422, Standard Test Method for Particle Size Analysis of Soils or Caltrans Test Method (CTM) C202.
  - d. Quality analysis results for compost performed in accordance with Seal of Testing Assurance (STA) standards, as specified in 4.
  - e. Organic content test results of mixed Bioretention Soil. Organic content test shall be performed in accordance with by Testing Methods for the Examination of Compost and Composting (TMECC) 05.07A, "Loss-On-Ignition Organic Matter Method".
  - f. Grain size analysis results of compost component performed in accordance with ASTM D 422, Standard Test Method for Particle Size Analysis of Soils.
  - g. A description of the equipment and methods used to mix the sand and compost to produce Bioretention Soil.
  - h. Provide the name of the testing laboratory(s) and the following information:

- (1) Contact person(s)
- (2) Address(s)
- (3) Phone contact(s)
- (4) E-mail address(s)
- (5) Qualifications of laboratory(s), and personnel including date of current certification by USCC, ASTM, Caltrans, or approved equal

3. Sand for Bioretention Soil

- a. Sand shall be free of wood, waste, coating such as clay, stone dust, carbonate, etc., or any other deleterious material. All aggregate passing the No. 200 sieve size shall be nonplastic.
- b. Sand for Bioretention Soils shall be analyzed by an accredited lab using #200, #100, #40 or #50, #30, #16, #8, #4, and 3/8 inch sieves (ASTM D 422, CTM 202 or as approved by municipality), and meet the following gradation:

Sieve Size	Percent Passing (by weight)	
	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
3/8 inch	100	100
No. 4	90	100
No. 8	70	100
No. 16	40	95
No. 30	15	70
No. 40 or No.50	5	55
No. 100	0	15
No. 200	0	5

Note: all sands complying with ASTM C33 for fine aggregate comply with the above gradation requirements.

4. Composted Material

Compost shall be a well decomposed, stable, weed free organic matter source derived from waste materials including yard debris, wood wastes or other organic materials not including manure or biosolids meeting the standards developed by the US Composting Council (USCC). The product shall be certified through the USCC Seal of Testing Assurance (STA) Program (a compost testing and information disclosure program).

- a. Compost Quality Analysis by Laboratory – Before delivery of the soil, the supplier shall submit a copy of lab analysis performed by a laboratory that is enrolled in the US Composting Council’s Compost Analysis Proficiency (CAP) program and using approved Test Methods for the Examination of Composting and Compost (TMECC). The lab report shall verify:
  - (1) Organic Matter Content: 35% - 75% by dry wt.

- (2) Carbon and Nitrogen Ratio: C:N < 25:1 and C:N >15:1
- (3) Maturity/Stability: Any one of the following is required to indicate stability:
  - (i) Oxygen Test < 1.3 O<sub>2</sub> /unit TS /hr
  - (ii) Specific oxy. Test < 1.5 O<sub>2</sub> / unit BVS /hr
  - (iii) Respiration test < 8 mg CO<sub>2</sub>-C /g OM / day
  - (iv) Dewar test < 20 Temp. rise (°C) e.
  - (v) Solvita® > 5 Index value
- (4) Toxicity: Any one of the following measures is sufficient to indicate non-toxicity.
  - (i) NH<sub>4</sub><sup>+</sup> : NO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>-N < 3
  - (ii) Ammonium < 500 ppm, dry basis
  - (iii) Seed Germination > 80 % of control
  - (iv) Plant Trials > 80% of control
  - (v) Solvita® = 5 Index value
- (5) Nutrient Content: provide analysis detailing nutrient content including N-P-K, Ca, Na, Mg, S, and B.
  - (i) Total Nitrogen content 0.9% or above preferred.
  - (ii) Boron: Total shall be <80 ppm;
- (6) Salinity: Must be reported; < 6.0 mmhos/cm
- (7) pH shall be between 6.2 and 8.2 May vary with plant species.
- b. Compost Quality Analysis by Compost Supplier – Before delivery of the compost to the soil supplier the Compost Supplier shall verify the following:
  - (1) Feedstock materials shall be specified and include one or more of the following: landscaping/yard trimmings, grass clippings, food scraps, and agricultural crop residues.
  - (2) Maturity/Stability: shall have a dark brown color and a soil-like odor. Compost exhibiting a sour or putrid smell or containing recognizable grass or leaves, or is hot (120F) upon delivery or rewetting is not acceptable.
  - (3) Weed seed/pathogen destruction: provide proof of process to further reduce pathogens (PFRP). For example, turned windrows must reach min. 55C for 15 days with at least 5 turnings during that period.
- c. Compost for Bioretention Soil Texture – Compost for bioretention soils shall be analyzed by an accredited lab using #200, 1/4 inch, 1/2 inch, and 1 inch sieves (ASTM D 422 or as approved by municipality), and meet the following gradation:

Sieve Size	Percent Passing (by weight)	
	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
1 inch	99	100
1/2 inch	90	100
1/4 inch	40	90
No. 200	1	10

- d. Bulk density shall be between 500 and 1100 dry lbs/cubic yard
- e. Moisture content shall be between 30% - 55% of dry solids.
- f. Inerts – compost shall be relatively free of inert ingredients, including glass, plastic and paper, < 1 % by weight or volume.
- g. Select Pathogens – Salmonella <3 MPN/4grams of TS, or Coliform Bacteria <10000 MPN/gram.
- h. Trace Contaminants Metals (Lead, Mercury, Etc.) – Product must meet US EPA, 40 CFR 503 regulations.
- i. Compost Testing – The compost supplier will test all compost products within 120 calendar days prior to application. Samples will be taken using the STA sample collection protocol. (The sample collection protocol can be obtained from the U.S. Composting Council, 4250 Veterans Memorial Highway, Suite 275, Holbrook, NY 11741 Phone: 631-737-4931, [www.compostingcouncil.org](http://www.compostingcouncil.org)). The sample shall be sent to an independent STA Program approved lab. The compost supplier will pay for the test.

### **VERIFICATION OF ALTERNATIVE BIORETENTION SOIL MIXES**

Bioretention soils not meeting the above criteria shall be evaluated on a case by case basis. Alternative bioretention soil shall meet the following specification: “Soils for bioretention facilities shall be sufficiently permeable to infiltrate runoff at a minimum rate of 5 inches per hour during the life of the facility, and provide sufficient retention of moisture and nutrients to support healthy vegetation.”

The following steps shall be followed by municipalities to verify that alternative soil mixes meet the specification:

1. General Requirements – Bioretention soil shall achieve a long-term, in-place infiltration rate of at least 5 inches per hour. Bioretention soil shall also support vigorous plant growth. The applicant refers to the entity proposing the soil mixture for approval.
  - a. Submittals – The applicant must submit to the municipality for approval:
    - (1) A minimum one-gallon size sample of mixed bioretention soil.
    - (2) Certification from the soil supplier or an accredited laboratory that the Bioretention Soil meets the requirements of this guideline specification.
    - (3) Certification from an accredited geotechnical testing laboratory that the Bioretention Soil has an infiltration rate between 5 and 12 inches per hour as tested according to Section 1.b.(2)(ii).
    - (4) Organic content test results of mixed Bioretention Soil. Organic content test shall be performed in accordance with by Testing Methods for the Examination of Compost and Composting (TMECC) 05.07A, “Loss-On-Ignition Organic Matter Method”.
    - (5) Grain size analysis results of mixed bioretention soil performed in accordance with ASTM D 422, Standard Test Method for Particle Size Analysis of Soils.
    - (6) A description of the equipment and methods used to mix the sand and compost to produce Bioretention Soil.
    - (7) The name of the testing laboratory(s) and the following information:
      - (i) Contact person(s)
      - (ii) Address(s)
      - (iii) Phone contact(s)

- (iv) E-mail address(s)
  - (v) Qualifications of laboratory(s), and personnel including date of current certification by STA, ASTM, or approved equal.
- b. Bioretention Soil
- (1) Bioretention Soil Texture: Bioretention Soils shall be analyzed by an accredited lab using #200, and 1/2" inch sieves (ASTM D 422 or as approved by municipality), and meet the following gradation:

Sieve Size	Percent Passing (by weight)	
	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
1/2 inch	97	100
No. 200	2	5

- (2) Bioretention Soil Permeability testing: Bioretention Soils shall be analyzed by an accredited geotechnical lab for the following tests:
- (i) Moisture – density relationships (compaction tests) shall be conducted on bioretention soil. Bioretention soil for the permeability test shall be compacted to 85 to 90 percent of the maximum dry density (ASTM D1557).
  - (ii) Constant head permeability testing in accordance with ASTM D2434 shall be conducted on a minimum of two samples with a 6-inch mold and vacuum saturation.

**MULCH FOR BIORETENTION FACILITIES**

Three inches of mulch is recommended for the purpose of retaining moisture, preventing erosion and minimizing weed growth. Projects subject to the State’s Model Water Efficiency Landscaping Ordinance (or comparable local ordinance) will be required to provide at least three inches of mulch. Aged mulch, also called compost mulch, reduces the ability of weeds to establish, keeps soil moist, and replenishes soil nutrients. Aged mulch can be obtained through soil suppliers or directly from commercial recycling yards. It is recommended to apply 1" to 2" of composted mulch, once a year, preferably in June following weeding.

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**San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board**

April 18, 2016  
CIWQS Place No. 756972 (SKM)

To: Municipal Regional Stormwater NPDES Permit (Order No. R2-2015-0049)  
Permittees

*Sent via email to:*

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**Subject: Approval of Revisions to Biotreatment Soil Media Specifications in  
Water Board Order No. R2-2015-0049, Municipal Regional Stormwater  
NPDES Permit**

On February 5, 2016, the Bay Area Stormwater Management Agencies Association (BASMAA) submitted proposed revisions to the biotreatment soil media specifications referenced in Provision C.3.c.i.(2)(c)(ii) of Board Order No. R2-2015-0049, the Municipal Regional Stormwater NPDES Permit (MRP). The proposed revisions were submitted on behalf of the 76 Permittees regulated by the MRP and were submitted as allowed under and in accordance with the requirements of Provision C.3.c.i.(2)(c)(ii).

The proposed revisions address issues with the current soil media specifications that Permittees have identified, based on implementation of these soil media specifications for the last 5 years under the previous MRP. These identified issues are as follows:

- Compost suppliers are having difficulties meeting the gradation specifications, soluble boron criteria, and occasionally the pH limits listed in the specifications.
- The specifications contain typographical errors and missing or incorrectly identified units of measurement.

This letter approves the Permittees' proposed changes to the biotreatment soil media specifications referenced in Provision C.3.c.i.(2)(c)(ii) of the MRP. We understand that BASMAA intends to convene a soil specification roundtable in Spring 2016 to investigate the need for alternative specifications that might enhance the performance of bioretention facilities under varying microclimates and drought conditions and with diverse planting palettes, including trees.

If you have questions, please contact Sue Ma of my staff at (510) 622-2386 or via email to [sma@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:sma@waterboards.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

for Bruce H. Wolfe  
Executive Officer