

Compost socks are mesh tubes filled with compost, installed across a slope or channel to prevent erosion and filter sediments out of runoff. Compost socks can also be used to direct or concentrate flows on hard surfaces. The tubes may be composed of burlap, biodegradable plastic, or nonbiodegradable (possibly reusable) plastic mesh. Compost socks function similarly to compost berms, with the added benefit of better withstanding machinery traffic. Because they are self-contained, compost socks may be installed on a wide variety of sites. For example, they can be circled around storm drains, lain across drainage swales, or moved according to the greatest need. Compost socks are easy to install properly on rocky slopes with rough surfaces.

### Installation

Typically, the mesh tubes are placed on-site with one end tied, filled with compost using a pneumatic blower, and anchored with stakes driven through the tubes. Because they do not need to be trenched into the ground, installing compost socks creates less soil disturbance than installing silt fence, and they can be installed on hard surfaces such as frozen ground or asphalt. The ends of compost socks should be curved upslope to contain flow. The size of the sock and type of compost used depends on the slope gradient and amount of flow and sediment the sock is expected to receive. Compost socks are usually 8–24” in diameter, and may be round or oval in profile. Staking through the sock every 8–10’ is usually sufficient to secure the sock in place. Socks should be inspected following heavy rains. Sediment should be removed if a layer accumulates to more than 1/3 the height of the sock.

Biodegradable mesh compost socks can be left in place and vegetated with native seed or live stakes to increase functionality. Seed can be mixed into the compost prior to filling and installation. Live stakes can be used to stake the sock in place. Socks made of non-biodegradable plastic mesh can be moved to a new project site if they are small enough, otherwise, they must be cut open so the compost can be spread in place and the mesh disposed of off-site following project completion.

### Applications

Beyond controlling erosion on construction sites and during installation of restoration projects, compost socks can be used in conjunction with vegetation to stabilize streambanks and shorelines. Compost socks can also be used as part of low impact development applications such as rain gardens or biofiltration swales to control erosion and filter stormwater while vegetation establishes.

### More resources

See our *Compost* sheet ([www.soundnativeplants.com/PDF/Compost.pdf](http://www.soundnativeplants.com/PDF/Compost.pdf)) for more information on the types of compost commonly available. See the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) fact sheet on *Compost Filter Socks* for information on specifying compost ([water.epa.gov/polwaste/npdes/swbmp/Compost-Filter-Socks.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/polwaste/npdes/swbmp/Compost-Filter-Socks.cfm)) and placing and sizing socks for various applications. See EPA’s *Erosion Control Alternatives Cost Calculator* ([www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/green/tools/erosion.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/green/tools/erosion.pdf)) for a pricing comparison. In general, compost filter socks are less costly than silt fencing if maintenance and disposal costs are factored in.