

Food security starts with good soil



YukonGrow has the know-how to help farms and gardens produce

Jeff Gaye

The riches beneath the ground are legendary in Yukon. There's great potential above ground too—but the soil needs a little help.

"Our native soil is awful. It's very poor," says Michel Duteau, owner of YukonGrow. Still, he says, agriculture and horticulture are expanding in the territory. His company helps producers, gardeners, and reclamation projects optimize conditions for successful growing.

"Our mission is to improve food security and reduce the environmental footprint of human activity up north," he said. "And that is articulated through offering products and services related to living soils, grow amendment and grow media.

"That means we help gardeners, farmers, horticulturalists, cannabis growers, as well as soil engineering practitioners, to improve or optimize grow conditions."

There are about 50 farms operating in Yukon—a "teeny tiny industry," Duteau says—but it's growing quickly. Indoor and outdoor operations, greenhouses and hydroponics have contributed to pronounced growth in the market gardening sector.



SPRING IS IN THE AIR!

YukonGrow

About Us

We are the Yukon's very own growing specialists! We are passionate about developing living soil blends and offering products adapted to our unique, northern growing conditions.

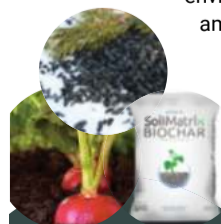
Whether you are a new or seasoned hobby gardener, horticulturist, a cannabis grower, landscaper or a soil engineering practitioner, we are here to support your growing goals.

Products

Can you believe we make many of our own soil blends right here in the Yukon? We are committed to making use of local, eco-friendly ingredients wherever possible, and to continue moving towards a more carbon-negative and low environmental footprint. We offer premium grow amendments and grow media such as biochar, compost, many fertilizers, beneficial microorganisms and much more.

Services

We offer testing and advising to help you optimize your grow conditions and make the most of Yukon's grow season.



Contact us at:
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"There's an effervescence in this industry at the moment," he said.

And those producers, as well as home gardeners, need good soil.

"Regenerative agriculture is our practice," Duteau said. "And this means that not only should you extract what you need from the soil, but make sure that you put back what will be needed in future years and continuously improve the conditions.

"Maintaining your soil with compost and manures over the years is a very good regenerative practice."

But in Yukon, it's often not enough. It can take years to accumulate enough organic matter to have a self-sustaining soil ecology.

YukonGrow can help the process along with custom-tailored application of soil products. One of these is a product called BioChar.

"BioChar is biomass that is cooked at high temperature in an oxygen-restricted environment," Duteau said. "You take leftovers of forestry like woodchips or sawdust, and you cook it up in a vessel where the oxygen is limited. You end up with a product that looks a lot like charcoal."

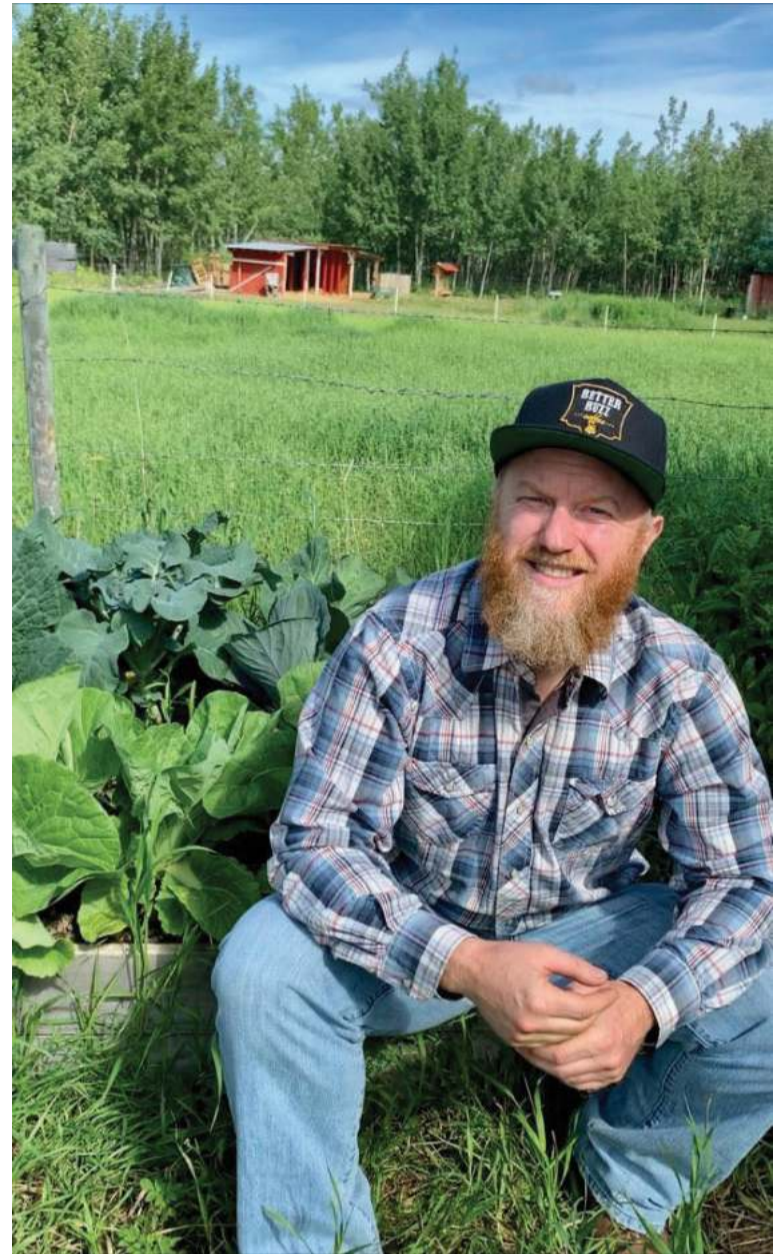
The product helps create a good habitat for beneficial microorganisms. It also improves the soil's structure, offering better irrigation, better drainage, and better water retention.

"The third advantage of BioChar is that it helps to convey the nutrients from the soil to the plants for better production of fruits and vegetables," Duteau said.

Local food production is particularly important in Yukon, he said, because supply chains from outside the territory are not always reliable.

Home gardeners and market gardens have historically been an important local food source. With Covid, there has been a further explosion of interest.

"There was a renewed interest in growing one's own food, and for an activity that is regenerative for oneself and that is healthy," Duteau said. "So there was a huge increase of demand for products like mine to build and maintain garden plots in Whitehorse and the territory in general."



But YukonGrow also works on an industrial scale. Duteau is often called to advise reclamation efforts after a mining site or other industrial activity stops operating.

In these cases he is not creating a lush garden, but giving the natural ecosystem a chance to take root.

"Usually the minimum will be done so as to give a chance to the ecosystem to re-establish itself with time. But we have to give it a boost," he said.

"We can't just leave bare gravel and wait four or five hundred years for the first plants to come back. But if we improve the conditions to a minimum, the ecosystem can take over and regenerate itself."

Whether it's a mine site, a commercial market garden or a backyard vegetable patch, Duteau says educating people is the best part of his job.

"You are introducing those principles of regenerative agriculture and improving people's understanding of how they can better produce vegetables, or better make use of the soil they have," he said. "This is my favourite part what we offer."

YukonGrow will analyze chemical and physical parameters of a client's soil through a third-party lab.

"Then I can advise on what they could do, and get their thoughts on adjusting practices; but also adjusting products or perhaps using beneficial microorganisms or specific types of compost, or using BioChar," he said.

"We offer not only the product, but most certainly the services to help them grow."

