

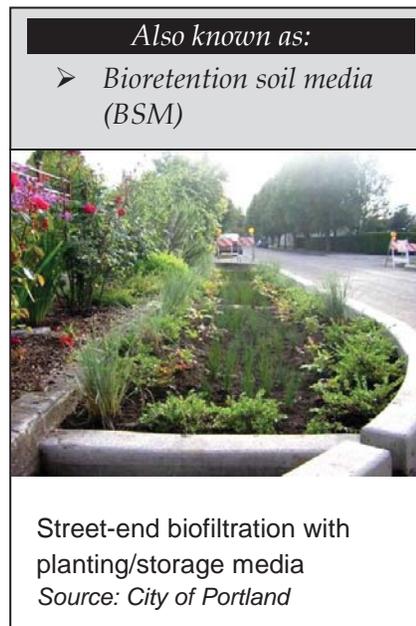
**XIV.2. Miscellaneous BMP Design Element Fact Sheets (MISC)**

MISC-1: Planting/Storage Media

Planting and storage media is a critical design element for several common BMP types, including bioretention, bioinfiltration, swales, filter strips, and greenroofs. This fact sheet is intended to be used as referenced from these fact sheets.

**General Design Criteria**

- Planting/storage media should be designed to achieve the long term hydraulic design requirements associated with the design of the facility (i.e., design  $K_{sat}$ ).
- The planting media shall be designed to address pollutants of concern at the design hydraulic capacity.
- Bioretention soil shall also support vigorous plant growth.
- Planting media should consist of 60 to 80% fine sand and 20 to 40% compost.
- Planting media for projects draining to nutrient sensitive receiving water should adhere to recommendations for nutrient sensitive planting media provided below.



**Sand**

- Sand should 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 should be non-plastic. Sand for bioretention should be analyzed by an accredited lab using #200, #100, #40, #30, #16, #8, #4, and 3/8 sieves (ASTM D 422 or as approved by the local permitting authority) and meet the following gradation (Note: all sands complying with ASTM C33 for fine aggregate comply with the gradation requirements below):

Sieve Size (ASTM D422)	% Passing (by weight)	
	Minimum	Maximum
3/8 inch	100	100
#4	90	100
#8	70	100
#16	40	95
#30	15	70
#40	5	55
#100	0	15
#200	0	5

- Note: the gradation of the sand component of the media is believed to be a major factor in the hydraulic conductivity of the media mix. If the desired hydraulic conductivity of the media cannot be achieved within the specified proportions of sand and compost (#2), then it may be necessary to utilize sand at the coarser end of the range specified in the table above (“minimum” column).

**Compost**

Compost should 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 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). Compost quality should be verified via a lab analysis to be:

- Feedstock materials shall be specified and include one or more of the following: landscape/yard trimmings, grass clippings, food scraps, and agricultural crop residues.
- Organic matter: 35-75% dry weight basis.
- Carbon and Nitrogen Ratio: 15:1 < C:N < 25:1
- Maturity/Stability: shall have dark brown color and a soil-like odor. Compost exhibiting a sour or putrid smell, containing recognizable grass or leaves, or is hot (120 F) upon delivery or rewetting is not acceptable.
- Toxicity: any one of the following measures is sufficient to indicate non-toxicity:
  - NH<sub>4</sub>:NH<sub>3</sub> < 3
  - Ammonium < 500 ppm, dry weight basis
  - Seed Germination > 80% of control
  - Plant trials > 80% of control
- Solvita<sup>®</sup> > 5 index value
- Nutrient content:
  - Total Nitrogen content 0.9% or above preferred
  - Total Boron should be <80 ppm, soluble boron < 2.5 ppm
- Salinity: < 6.0 mmhos/cm
- pH between 6.5 and 8 (may vary with plant palette)
- Compost for bioretention should be analyzed by an accredited lab using #200, ¼ inch, ½ inch, and 1 inch sieves (ASTM D 422 or as approved by the local permitting authority) and meet the following gradation:

Sieve Size (ASTM D422)	% Passing (by weight)	
	Minimum	Maximum
1 inch	99	100
½ inch	90	100
¼ inch	40	90
#200	2	10

- Tests should be sufficiently recent to represent the actual material that is anticipated to be delivered to the site. If processes or sources used by the supplier have changed significantly since the most recent testing, new tests should be requested.
- Note: the gradation of compost used in bioretention media is believed to play an important role in the saturated hydraulic conductivity of the media. To achieve a higher saturated hydraulic conductivity, it may be necessary to utilize compost at the coarser end of this range (“minimum” column). The percent passing the #200 sieve (fines) is believed to be the most important factor in hydraulic conductivity. In addition, a coarser compost mix provides more heterogeneity of the bioretention media, which is believed to be advantageous for more rapid development of soil structure needed to support health biological processes. This may be an advantage for plant establishment with lower nutrient and water input.

### **Mulch**

- Planting area should generally be covered with 2 to 4 inches (average 3 inches) of mulch at the start and an additional placement of 1 to 2 inches of mulch should be added annually. *The intention is that to help sustain the nutrient levels, suppress weeds, retain moisture, and maintain infiltration capacity.*
- For nutrient-sensitive planting/storage media design, inorganic mulch such as gravel, may be used.

### **Planting/Storage Media Design for Nutrient Sensitive Receiving Waters**

Where the BMP discharges to receiving waters with nutrient impairments or nutrient TMDLs, the planting media placed should be designed with the specific goal of minimizing the potential for initial and long term leaching of nutrients from the media.

- In general, the potential for leaching of nutrients can be minimized by:
  - Utilizing stable, aged compost (as required of media mixes under all conditions).
  - Utilizing other sources of organic matter, as appropriate, that are safe, non-toxic, and have lower potential for nutrient leaching than compost.
  - Reducing the content of compost or other organic material in the media mix to the minimum amount necessary to support vigorous plant growth and healthy biological processes.
- A landscape architect should be consulted to assist in the design of planting/storage media to balance the interests of plant establishment, water retention capacity (irrigation demand), and the potential for nutrient leaching. The following practices should be considered in developing the media mix design:
  - The actual nutrient content and organic content of the selected compost source should be considered when specifying the proportions of compost and sand. The compost specification allows a range of organic content over approximately a factor of 2 and nutrient content may vary more widely. Therefore determining the actual organic content and nutrient content of the compost expected to be supplied is important in determining the proportion to be used for amendment.
  - A commitment to periodic soil testing for nutrient content and a commitment to adaptive management of nutrient levels can help reduce the amount of organic amendment that must be provided initially. Generally, nutrients can be added planting areas through the addition of organic mulch, but cannot be removed.
  - Plant palettes and the associated planting mix should be designed with native plants where possible. Native plants generally have a broader tolerance for nutrient content, and can be longer lived in leaner/lower nutrient soils. An additional benefit of lower nutrient levels is that native plants will generally have less competition from weeds.

- Nutrients are better retained in soils with higher cation exchange capacity (CEC). CEC can be increased through selection of organic material with naturally high CEC, such as peat, and/or selection of inorganic material with high CEC such as some sands or engineered minerals (e.g., low P-index sands, zeolites, rhyolites, etc). Including higher CEC materials would tend to reduce the net leaching of nutrients.
- Soil structure can be more important than nutrient content in plant survival and biologic health of the system. If a good soil structure can be created with very low amounts of compost, plants survivability should still be provided. Soil structure is loosely defined as the ability of the soil to conduct and store water and nutrients as well as the degree of aeration of the soil. While soil structure generally develops with time, planting/storage media can be designed to promote earlier development of soil structure. Soil structure is enhanced by the use of amendments with high hummus content (as found in well-aged organic material). In addition, soil structure can be enhanced through the use of compost/organic material with a distribution of particle sizes (i.e., a more heterogeneous mix). Finally, inorganic amendments such as polymer beads may be useful for promoting aeration and moisture retention associated with a good soil structure. An example of engineered soil to promote soil structure can be found here:  
<http://www.hort.cornell.edu/uhi/outreach/pdfs/custructuralsoilwebpdf.pdf>
- Younger plants are generally more tolerant of lower nutrient levels and tend to help develop soil structure as they grow. Starting plants from smaller transplants can help reduce the need for organic amendments and improve soil structure. The project should be able to accept a plant mortality rate that is somewhat higher than starting from larger plants and providing high organic content.
- With these considerations, it is anticipated that less than 10 percent compost amendment could be used, while still balancing plant survivability and water retention.

We wish to express our gratitude to following individuals for their feedback on the design of planting/storage media for nutrient sensitive receiving waters in Southern California.

Deborah Deets, City of Los Angeles Bureau of Sanitation

Drew Ready, LA and San Gabriel Rivers Watershed Council

Rick Fisher, ASLA, City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering

Dr. Garn Wallace, Wallace Laboratories

Glen Dake, GDML

Jason Schmidt, Tree People

The guidance provided herein does not reflect the individual opinions of any individual listed above and should not be cited or otherwise attributed to those listed.

### ***Selecting Plants for Planting/Storage Media***

---

- Plant materials should be tolerant of summer drought, ponding fluctuations, and saturated soil conditions for 48 to 96 hours.
- It is recommended that a minimum of three types of tree, shrubs, and/or herbaceous groundcover species be incorporated to protect against facility failure due to disease and insect infestations of a single species.
- Native plant species and/or hardy cultivars that are not invasive and do not require chemical inputs should be used to the maximum extent feasible.