

What's the deal with bug poop?



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Chapul Farms converts organic waste into a nutrient-rich soil amendment. PHOTO COURTESY OF CHAPUL FARMS

There is always so much to see and learn at the Farwest Show, put on by the Oregon Association of Nurseries, and this year was no exception. Walking through the aisles and looking at the booths, there was a wide array of new products and plants.

One particular booth caught my eye, because at first glance it appeared that they were marketing bug poop. Upon further inspection, yes indeed, that is exactly what they were marketing — bug poop. Of course, with a product like that, there are many questions, and I wanted to learn their story, which is fascinating.

In the beginning

The story begins with **Chapul Farms**, located in McMinnville, Oregon, which designs, builds and operates insect farms. This was such a unique concept to me that I needed to learn more. Thus, I contacted Pat Crowley, the founder and CEO. Pat is a climate modeler, hydrologist, agronomist, and is a founding member and previous industry chair of the Center for Environmental Sustainability Through Insect Farming.

These farms convert organic waste

into two products: high protein animal feed and a nutrient-rich soil amendment. This soil amendment consists of 100% black soldier fly frass, (insect poop), which gives it a 3-2-2 formula.

The stellar producer in these farms is the native black soldier fly larvae which can be used to compost organic waste and create nutrient-rich soil amendments. Taking food waste that has been diverted from landfills and using the black fly larvae, zero waste processing can occur in less than 14 days.

The resulting product is rich in soil microbes and is a nature-based soil enhancer that increases soil biodiversity. This certainly seems like a viable solution to the current day problem of trying to keep materials out of landfills. Any new product needs a distribution system, and the Milwaukie, Oregon based company Concentrates is on board as a distributor.

Ramping up

In May of 2024, the United States Department of Agriculture awarded grants to three projects that are studying how the black soldier fly's larvae turn food waste into a soil enhancer. Chapul Farms was

one of the three selected to receive one of these grants. As the study progresses, it is likely to result in the frass, the excrement, and exoskeleton of the black soldier fly being packaged and marketed to garden centers in the spring of 2026.

To increase their ability to meet consumer needs, Chapul Farms is currently building a facility at their McMinnville location that will be able to take 50 tons of waste per day. This facility is scheduled to open in late 2026.

Poop by any other name

A major question in the marketing of this product is whether the gardening consumer will realize the value of this new product, or will the name possibly turn them off? The name on the front side of the bag that I originally received was called “bug poop+.” Looking at the back side it was labeled as insect frass. Bug poop and insect frass are not exactly words that would probably entice a gardener to purchase it.

However, since the August date of the Farwest Show, the package has been changed and it is now called “Soil Revival,” which to me has more of a positive tone and upbeat meaning. Many gardeners would jump at the chance to just add a new amendment to the soil to revive it to a more energetic growth environment.

Consumers can be very particular about purchasing new products. Often, if gardener's previous gardening techniques worked, it may be a challenge to get them to change. However, it is certainly not impossible, and most gardeners are very environmentally motivated and strive to do the best practices for our planet. ➤

What I'm Hearing

Chapul Farms redesigned the product's packaging to focus on the benefits of the product instead of its key ingredient.

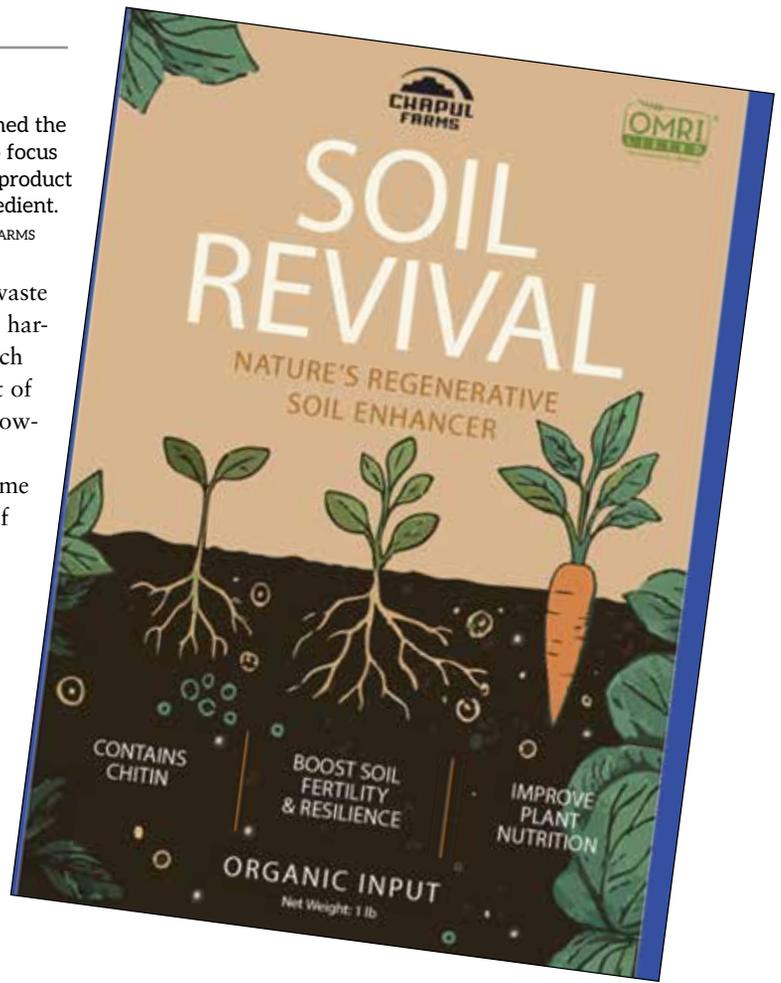
PHOTO COURTESY OF CHAPUL FARMS

The concept with this product is that it is taking food waste and letting the black soldier fly eat this waste, which is then harvested and can be used in our gardens as a soil enhancer. Such a concept involves the best of both worlds, making the most of our food waste while producing a better environment for growing more things to enhance our livability.

For gardeners, spring is a time of renewal, and also a time to try to new plants and new products. Soil Revival is one of what will be one many new items on the shelves of garden centers in the spring of 2026.

If the concept behind this product is told to garden center personnel and they pass it on to gardeners, it will be a successful new product. Getting the word out on any new product or plant can be difficult but I think that when a gardener realizes the benefits of Soil Revival, it will be something new to try.

It will also be a feel-good purchase because we all need to help our environment stay healthy. Soil Revival may be only a small step but it could be a giant leap to help our environment. ©



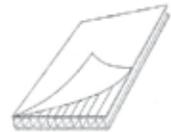
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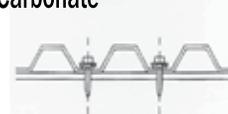


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