

WHY SHOULD I MAKE COMPOST?

Composting is the most practical and convenient way to handle your yard wastes. It can be easier and cheaper than bagging these wastes or taking them to the recycling center. Compost also improves your soil and the plants growing in it. If you have a garden, a lawn, trees, shrubs, or even planter boxes, you have a use for compost.

WHAT CAN I COMPOST?

“DO” Compost in

- Grass clippings
- Leaves
- Flowers
- Old plants
- Old potting soil
- Twigs
- Annual weeds
- Vegetable scraps
- Bread and grains
- Coffee filters/tea bags

“DON’T” Compost in

- Diseased plants
- Insect infested plants
- Weeds with seeds
- Invasive weeds
 - Quackgrass
 - Morning Glory
 - Buttercup
- Meat or fish parts
- Cheese, butter, milk...
- Cooking oil or oily foods
- Dog & Cat manure
- Dead Animals

HOW CAN I USE COMPOST?

Compost soil, can be used to enrich the flower and vegetable garden to improve the soil around trees and shrubs, as a soil amendment for houseplants and planter boxes and, when screened, as part of a seed-starting mix or lawn top-dressing. Before they decompose, chipped woody wastes make excellent mulch or path material. Mulch should only be 2-3” deep around trees and shrubs. After they decompose, these same woody wastes will add texture to garden soils.



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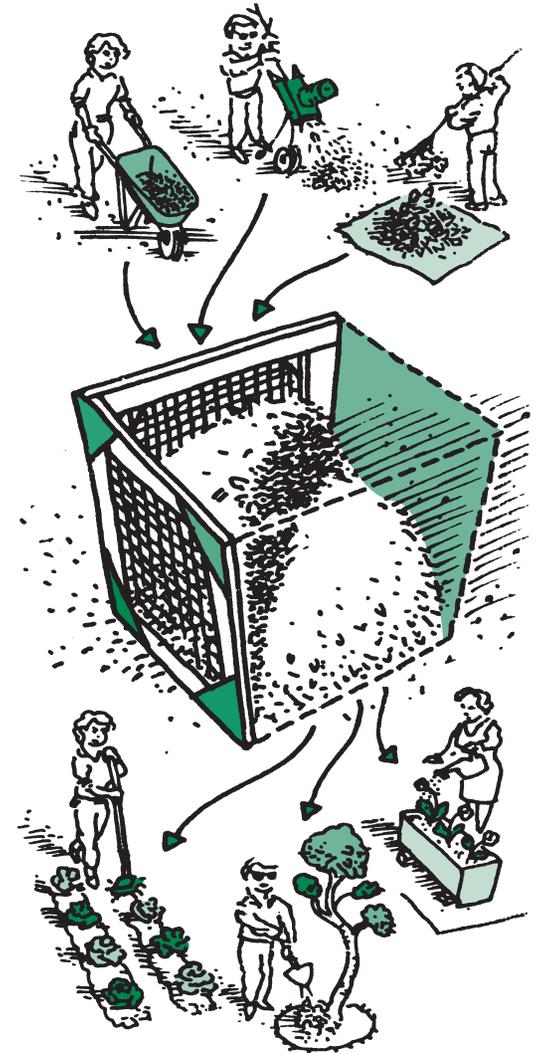


Mixed Sources
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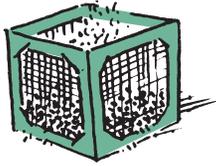
Home Composting



WHAT IS COMPOST?

Compost is a dark, crumbly, and earthy-smelling form of decomposing organic matter.

PILES AND HOLDING UNITS



HOW? Place the pile or holding unit where it is most convenient. As weeds, grass clippings, leaves and harvest remains from garden plants are collected, they can be dropped in. Chopping or shredding wastes, alternating high-carbon and high-nitrogen materials, and keeping up good moisture and aeration will all speed the process.

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ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES For yard wastes this is the simplest method. A unit can be portable, moving to wherever needed in the garden. This method can take from 6 months to 2 years to compost organic materials, so you only need to be patient.

MORE IDEAS Holding units can be made of circles of hardware cloth, old wooden pallets, or wood and wire. Sod can be composted with or without a holding unit, by turning sections of it over, making sure that there is adequate moisture, and covering it with black plastic.

COMPOST TROUBLE SHOOTING

SYMPTOMS	PROBLEMS	SOLUTION
The compost has a bad odor.	Not enough air; pile too wet.	Turn it; add coarse dry materials such as straw, corn stalk, etc.
The center of the pile is dry.	Not enough water; too much woody coarse material.	Turn and moisten materials; add fresh green wastes, chop or shred coarse wastes.
The compost is damp & warm in the middle, but nowhere else.	Too small.	Collect more material & mix the old ingredients into a pile.
The heap is damp and sweet-smelling but still will not heat up.	Lack of nitrogen.	Mix in a nitrogen source like fresh grass clippings, fresh manure, bloodmeal or ammonium sulfate.

The ESSENTIALS of Composting



Biology

The compost pile is really a teeming microbial farm. Bacteria start the process of decaying organic matter. They are the first to break down plant tissue and also the most numerous and effective composters. Fungi and protozoans soon join the bacteria and, somewhat later in the cycle, centipedes, millipedes, beetles and earthworms do their part.



Materials

Anything growing in your yard is potential food for these tiny decomposers. Carbon and nitrogen, from the cells of dead plants and dead microbes, fuel their activity. The micro-organisms use the carbon in leaves or woodier wastes as an energy source. Nitrogen provides the microbes with the raw element or proteins to build their bodies.

Everything organic has a ratio of carbon to nitrogen (C:N) in its tissues, ranging from 500:1 for sawdust, to 15:1 for table scraps. A C:N ratio of 30:1 is ideal for the activity of compost microbes. This balance can be achieved by mixing two parts grass clippings (which have a C:N ratio of 20:1) with one part fallen leaves (60:1) in your compost. Layering can be useful in arriving at these proportions, but a complete mixing of ingredients is preferable for the composting process. Other materials can also be used, such as weeds and garden wastes. Though the C:N ration of 30:1 is ideal for a fast, hot compost, a higher ratio (i.e., 50:1) will be adequate for a slower compost.



Surface Area

The more surface area the micro-organisms have to work on, the faster the materials are decomposed. It's like a block of ice in the sun - slow to melt

“With these principles in mind, everyone can make excellent use of their organic wastes.”

when it's large, but melting very fast when broken down into smaller pieces. Chopping your garden wastes with a shovel or machete, or running them through a shredding machine or lawnmower will speed their composting.



Volume

A large compost pile will insulate itself and hold the heat of microbial activity. Its center will be warmer than its edges. Piles smaller than 3 feet x 3 feet (27 cu.ft.) will have trouble holding this heat, while piles larger than 5 feet x 5 feet (125 cu.ft.) don't allow enough air to reach the microbes at the center. These proportions are of importance only if your goal is a fast, hot compost.



Moisture & Aeration

All life on Earth needs a certain amount of water and air to sustain itself. The microbes in the compost pile are no different. They function best when the compost materials are about as moist as a wrung-out sponge, and are provided with many air passages. Extremes of sun or rain can adversely affect this moisture balance in your pile.



Time & Temperature

The faster the composting, the hotter the pile. If you use materials with a proper C:N ratio, provide a large amount of surface area and a big enough volume, and see that moisture and aeration are adequate, you will have a hot, fast compost (hot enough to burn your hand!) and will probably want to use a turning unit. If you just want to deal with your yard wastes in an inexpensive, easy, non-polluting way, a holding unit can serve you well.