Why Compost?

Composting is a convenient way to transform yard wastes into a resource. Compost enriches your garden soil and improves plant growth.

It does this by adding helpful nutrients to the soil and enables soil to better hold water and nutrients for your lawn and garden. Best of all, it is free! By composting you help reduce the pressure on our landfill's limited capacity. Yard wastes comprise up to 25% of the average household's garbage.

Biology of A Compost Pile

The compost pile breaks down your organic materials with the use of naturally occurring microbes They come in naturally with one shovelful of rich soil. Bacteria start the process of decay. Fungi and protozoans soon join the bacteria and later centipedes, millipedes, beetles, sow bugs and earthworms all help in the final breakdown into a material that resembles rich, dark soil.

Setting up for Composting...

Composting can occur in any number of places; in a dug-out trench in the back yard, in compost containers sold by garden supply companies or in home-made areas set aside with cinder blocks or fencing. You can construct a bin made out of wood and hardware cloth or old wooden pallets. Three feet square is a good size for a bin. Since occasionally turning the compost pile helps speed the process, you might set up a series of two or more bins that allow you to turn the pile from one bin to another.

The biggest stumbling block to composting is getting into in the habit of doing it. When you reach for the sink disposal or trash can, ask yourself if it shouldn't be composted instead. To get into the practice of composting, set a small bucket (with a lid) next to your kitchen trash can and then get into the habit of filling it with appropriate kitchen scraps.

What <u>not</u> to Compost ...

1. **Meat** or meat by-products. It makes for a greasy pile that attracts flies and the neighbors' dogs.
2. Any **salty foods** such as pickles or potato chips. Any kind of salt is bad for soil.
3 Anything that was treated with **herbicides**. Grass clippings are O.K. after they have set for at least 2 months.
4. **Compost starters**. Save your money because research shows that this stuff doesn't get your compost working any better than a shovel full of manure or plain old dirt.
5. **Wood ash**. While many books may say it's o.k., our western soils cannot tolerate the alkaline effect that ash has on plants.
6. Large pieces of **wood or branches** take forever to compost, unless first run through a shredder or chipper. Chipped wood is better used when laid on the soil surface to mark garden paths and around the base of trees and shrubs as it keeps weeds down.

What to Compost...

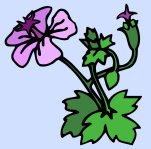
Most anything that was once growing or part of a living thing is usually fair game. Virtually any kitchen scrap from coffee grounds to potato skins. Manure in small quantities is fine. The key to a successful compost pile is in having a proper mix of compostable items. Set up a classification system in your mind that labels everything you would throw into a compost pile into two categories.

Good Stuff !

Grass mowing, hay, straw & bedding from vegetarian pets like rabbits, guinea pigs and gerbils all are good stuff.

Bush & Tree woody prunnings if shredded small and autumn leaves if first thoroughly incorporated.

Food Waste: Tea bags, vegetable peelings, egg shells, old fruit & veggies



Chopped up vegetables, plants, flowers

Category One: Is The Green List.

The green list includes anything that is green in color. Also on the green list are kitchen scraps, fresh garden waste, and manure (even though it is brown it is on the green list). In general, it includes everything that is high in nitrogen. Even human hair works great if you gave the kids haircuts; the same is true for pet hair.

Category Two: Is The Brown List.

This Includes everything that is tan or brown in color such as straw, saw dust, and any dried old plant refuse or organic matter that has turned brown (leaves, tan grass clippings, etc.) These are things that are relatively low in nitrogen. Before you proceed, read the basic compost rules on the other side:

Compost Rules ...

1. The smaller the ingredients, the faster and better your compost will become. Make your ingredients smaller by simply chopping them with a sharp-edged shovel on the ground before you throw them in. You can also rent, buy or borrow a shredder/grinder. The goal is to get all the ingredients to around three or four square inches or smaller. Kitchen scraps are usually small enough, but if they are not, cut them up.
2. Compost needs to breathe in order to do the break down the waste. You can get air to your compost pile by either turning the pile every 2 to 4 weeks (much less often in winter). You can also poke air holes in your pile with a sharp pole.
3. Compost piles get thirsty. Don't get carried away and drown them. The pile needs to be moist like a wrung out towel, not dripping wet. An occasional watering is helpful to a good pile, especially if it hasn't rained in a while.

THE RECIPE

1. Combine by volume, one part "*Brown Stuff*" to one part "*Green Stuff*." Exception: see rule #4.
2. Mix the ingredients so there is not a high concentration of either green or brown materials in any one place in the pile.
3. If you want your pile to continue working in winter, it needs to be large, at least a few square yards in size. If it's not, no big deal; it'll get going again come spring. A larger pile may need more frequent turning.
4. Manures (classified as a Green material) and sawdust (classified as a Brown material) are much more potent than other ingredients. Therefore only use 1/3 of a shovelful or less of these ingredients for every shovelful of other brown or green ingredients.

Signs of Success...

You will notice that the pile will start to heat up to over 100 degrees (unless it is winter). It will turn dark and start to resemble rich dark soil; it may also have some areas that are ash colored. It should be relatively odorless. When the pile cools off and the material resembles soil, it's ready to use.

Your compost is ready when no more heat is generated after turning, and it is a the dark, crumbly texture with few signs of the original material left.

THE COMPOST TROUBLESHOOTER...

Pile doesn't heat-up: check moisture level, add more green material.

The pile smells bad: add air, poke air holes in the pile or turn it and cut back on water.

The compost is slow to breakdown: the pieces you added may be too large, or it's too cold outside. Be patient, things will speed up when it heats up.

SOIL INCORPORATION...

. . . Dig it into your garden as you would manure or fertilizer. You can add up to three inches of compost to the top six inches of garden soil. It can also be used as a mulch, laid directly on the soil surface of lawns or gardens.

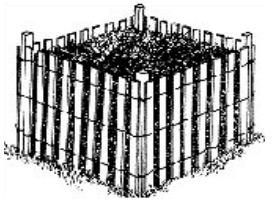
The Composting Companion

A guide to help take the mystery out of backyard composting

Recycled pallets

Recycled fencing

Multiple bins



Recycled Snow Fence

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