

Backyard Composting

WHY COMPOST?

1. Waste (and methane) reduction: 26% of all waste is organic/vegetative
2. Resource creation

BUILDING THE PILE: ESSENTIALS OF COMPOSTING

- c:n ratio: brown-green: 2:1 (or 1:1) by volume
- moisture: about as damp as a rung out sponge
- aeration: turning pile accelerates decomposition
- volume: approximately one cubic yard (3x3x3)
- surface area: the greater the surface area the faster the decomposition

WHAT CAN YOU COMPOST?

- YES: lots of things! e.g. vegetative kitchen and garden materials, animal manure, coffee grinds, houseplant clippings, hair
- NO: Meats, fats, oils, dairy products, pet waste (from meat-eating pets), contact poisonous plants, disease- or insect-infested plants, aggressive plants, weed seeds, colored paper, charcoal ash

METHOD OPTIONS: HOT PILE (BATCHING) VS. COOL PILE (LAYERING)

SYSTEMS: Keep compostable material organized, more efficient and more aesthetically pleasing

- Single or Multi-Bin Systems
- Homemade or Manufactured

OTHER OPTIONS FOR FOOD SCRAP MANAGEMENT

- Soil Incorporation/Trenching
 - α At least 12" from surface
 - α Don't plant where you're burying materials
 - α 6-8 weeks for decomposition.
- Vermicomposting: RED WIGGLERS (not earthworms)

A FEW BENEFITS OF USING FINISHED COMPOST

Finished compost:

- Improves Soil health and texture
- Makes mineral nutrients more readily available to plants, improving growth
- Reduces need for synthetic fertilizers, pesticides (reducing non-point source pollution)
- Increases water-holding capacity of soils, reducing erosion/water requirements, plant stress
- Moderates soil temperature, reducing plant stress

USING FINISHED COMPOST

- Topdressing (under mulch) (Benefits of mulching: moderate soil temperature, retain moisture, control weeds, protect tree/ shrubs from mower/trimmer Blades) **Don't Over mulch.**
- Soil Amendment (above ground when planting trees/shrubs)
- Potting/Seed Starting Mix (Be sure to use mature compost)
- Compost Tea: 1:10 parts compost to water, steep 1 hour to 7 days (aerate) in covered container

SOME OF MY FAVORITES:

Books

Weedless Gardening by Lee Reich

The Rodale Book of Composting by Rodale Press

Worms Eat My Garbage by Mary Apelhof, Flower Press.

Let it Rot! The Home Gardener's Guide to Composting by Stu Campbell.

The Incredible Heap, A Guide to Compost Gardening by Chris Catton, St. Marten's Press, 1983. Out of print--check your local library.

Backyard Composting: Your Complete Guide to Recycling Yard Clippings by Harmonious Technologies. Available though amazon.com.

Internet

- Google "No nonsense composting information". In general .com or .edu sites are most reliable for strictly information purposes.
- www.recycleworks.co.uk/
- www.leereich.com
- www.makedirtnotwaste.org
- www.compost-bin.org
- www.emilycompost.com/compost.htm

Compost Bins, Tools and Scrap Buckets

Commercially manufactured bins are available through garden centers, hardware stores, mail order supply companies, and some county or municipal recycling offices. Several sources are listed below.

- Lee Valley Tools, 1-800-871-8158 or www.leevalley.com
- Gardener's Supply Co., 800-876-5520 www.gardeners.com
- Rainbow Environmental Products, The Earth Machine (in quantities of 25 or more) 1-800-842-0527

Worms and Worm Bins

Red worms (aka red wigglers, manure worms, or the latin *Eisenia fetida*) can be used for indoor composting, or added to an outdoor pile or garden.

- www.compost-bin.org/buy-red-worms
- Flowerfield Farms www.wormwoman.com 269 327-0108

"My whole life has been spent waiting for an epiphany, a manifestation of God's presence, the kind of transcendent, magical experience that lets you see your place in the big picture. And that is what I had with my first compost heap."

- Bette Midler, *Los Angeles Times*, May 1996