How to Compost

Benefits of Composting

Enormous benefits can be had by adding just a little compost to your soil. Adding compost improves soil structure, aeration and water retention. It also adds important micronutrients and increases the bacterial activity in the soil.

Compost can be used for:

- House Plants
- Soil amendment and fertilizer
- Flower and Vegetable Beds
- New planting areas
- Established planting areas
- Lawn top dressing
- Around trees

Resource

Your Compost Resource.
http://www.howtocompost.org/

Eartheasy. Solutions for Sustainable Living.
http://eartheasy.com/grow_compost.html

PA Department of Environmental Protection:
http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/composting/14063

How to get Started

Step 1: Choose a Compost Bin

There are many types of bins used to hold compost materials. These include commercially made square or cone shaped plastic bins, homemade square bins often made of wood and rotating tumbler style bins.

Step 2: Selecting a Location

Choose a site that is level and well drained that is easily accessible year round. Place the bin over bare soil rather than concrete or paving to ensure that worms and other beneficial organisms can make their way into the pile. It's a good idea to remove any grass or plants and turn the soil to a depth of about 6-8 inches.

What makes Compost

Step 3: Add Good Composting Materials

Generally, composting ingredients can be divided into two categories:

Brown Materials such as: leaves, hay, straw, paper, cardboard, woody prunings, eggshells, coffee grounds, tea bags, and sawdust.

Green Materials such as: grass clippings, vegetable peelings, fruit peelings, fresh manure, green plant cuttings, annual weeds, and young hedge trimmings.

Step 4: What Not to Add to Your Compost

Adding some items will simply slow down the composting process by excluding the oxygen that helpful organisms need to do their job. Other items may attract pests and scavengers while others are simply dangerous because of the chance of poisoning or disease.

Don't add the following materials: meat and bones, poultry and fish, fatty food waste, whole eggs, dairy products, human and pet feces, pernicious weeds, treated wood.

Step 5: Making Great Compost

Start with a 4 inch layer of brush, twigs, hay or straw at the bottom of the bin. Then add a 4 inch layer of brown material, then a thin layer of finished compost or good garden soil. That's one layer.

Then add a 4 inch layer of green material topped with a thin layer of compost or soil. Moisten each layer by misting it lightly with a garden hose. Keep adding materials in alternating layers of greens and browns until the bin is full.

One you have a full bin you can turn the pile every 14 days or so. The more you turn the pile the faster you will have finished compost.

When to use your Compost

Step 6: Using Your Compost

It can take anywhere from 14 days to 12 months to produce your finished compost. The time it takes can vary widely depending on the materials and methods used.

The point at which the compost is ready varies based on how the compost will be used. In general, though, compost is ready when dark and crumbly and mostly broken down with a pleasant, earthy, soil-like smell to it. For most uses it is acceptable to have some recognizable pieces of leaves or straw remaining.

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