

Composting



Why Compost?

Composting provides nutrient rich organic material for your herb, vegetable, and perennial gardens. There is no fertilizer more natural or healthier for your garden. The time is quickly approaching when homeowners will be responsible for the disposal of their own yard waste. Learn how to take advantage of this possibility now.

The Process

Clippings, leaves, and other clean yard or vegetable wastes are layered with soil, and organic garden fertilizer or compost maker (if desired). The pile is kept moist and turned. The pile heats as bacteria and fungi break down the ingredients. The process usually takes 2 to 6 months for a properly prepared and tended pile.

How to Build a Compost Pile

Composting does not require a bin, but it does help to keep the pile neat and easier to handle. The bin must be at least 3x3x3 to heat properly, but 5x5x5 seems to be a useful and manageable size for most home composting.

Many styles of bins are available ready made, or you can make your own with concrete blocks, chicken wire, fencing or wooden slats. The sides of the bin must allow for air circulation and it helps to be able to remove one side of the bin to facilitate turning.

Location

Try to keep the bin in a location that is well drained, out of midday sun, away from tree roots, and within the reach of a garden hose. Remove any sod in the area that will be directly under the bin so the pile will make soil contact.

What to Compost

Leaves. grass clippings. wood ashes. plant refuse. vegetable parings.

wood chips and sod.

A note about grass clipping: If you mow properly you will not need to rake and remove grass clippings. In fact, those clippings will break down and provide beneficial nutrients to your lawn, which can reduce the need to fertilize by 25%.

Layering

Place a 6-8" layer of the materials to be composted in the bin. Sprinkle the layer with 1/2-1 cup of a garden fertilizer such as 5-10-5, 10-6-4, or 10-10-10. Cover with a 1-2" layer of garden soil. Moisten each layer as it is added. Leave a depression in the top of the pile so it will catch rainwater. If our weather is extremely wet or dry, cover the pile with a sheet of plastic to keep it evenly moist.

Turning

After a week the pile should be turned. When you turn the pile you simply move the inside of the pile to the outside and the outside to the inside so that all the components of the pile will be heated. During warm weather turn the pile every 1-2 weeks. In cooler spring and fall weather turn the pile every 4-6 weeks.

Finished compost will be dark in color, crumbly in texture and will have an 'earthy' smell. The volume of the pile will be reduced to 1/3 to 1/2 its original size. Compost is an excellent soil additive and can be a useful mulch.

Composting Tips

- Do not use any type of greasy or oily kitchen scraps, which can attract rodent or insect pests.
- Leaves and woody clippings will compost faster if they are shredded.
- Insect or disease infested materials should not be added to the pile.
- The long term effects of using composted materials that have been treated with herbicides has been linked to cancer and other serious ailments to plants, people, and animals. **A Guy & His Dog Landscaping** does not recommend using any chemical fertilizer or chemical pesticide in the landscape or in the compost pile.
- Dog and cat manures should not be included in compost pile.

