Composting

A Beginners Guide

Food and lawn waste comprises more than 25 percent of all waste in landfills. Unfortunately, due to the densely packed nature of landfills — and the lack of oxygen — the waste does not break down effectively. So, making compost is not only healthy because compost can be used to grow nutrient rich food in the garden, but also has great potential benefit for the environment.

Getting Started

First, set up a compost "bin."An easy, affordable method is using an inexpensive trash container. Buy a medium or large plastic or rubber trash receptacle with a tight fitting lid. To allow airflow, take a drill and bore holes in the lid, side and bottom of the container.

Handier people might try constructing a wire compost bin, which allows for maximum oxygen circulation. Take three to four stakes placed in the ground in a circle or rectangle. Surround the stakes with approximately 10 feet of wire or plastic mesh. Tie the mesh in place with cable ties or staples.

Commercial bins are also available at nurseries or home improvement stores; however, they can be expensive.

What to Compost

There are a variety of things in and around the home that can be composted including: grass clippings, leaves, hay, weeds and garden waste, wood fireplace ash, kitchen waste (coffee grounds, eggshells, vegetable peels, rinds, tea bags, scraps), wood chips and sawdust.

What NOT to Compost

Avoid composting any chemically treated wood products, diseased plants, pernicious weeds, dog or cat waste, meat, bones, dairy products, animal food products, fats and oils, cooked food, lime, or glossy paper.

Patience and a Pitchfork

Now, wait…and let nature take its course.

Water the compost regularly to make sure it is damp, but not soggy.

Use a pitchfork or "aerator" to turn the pile once a week letting the oxygen in to increase the decaying process. Aerating a compost heap weekly usually produces compost in several months. The more often a compost heap is turned, the faster it will break down. Finished compost should smell earthy and sweet.
Composting is nature's way of recycling by breaking down organic materials into a natural fertilizer.

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