

Composting

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Cold composting works well for those who have little time and not a great deal of yard waste. Start with dried leaves on the ground and add grass clippings. Then just add yard waste as you do your lawn maintenance. The only drawback with this method is that you may have to wait several months to a year for the compost to be ready to use.

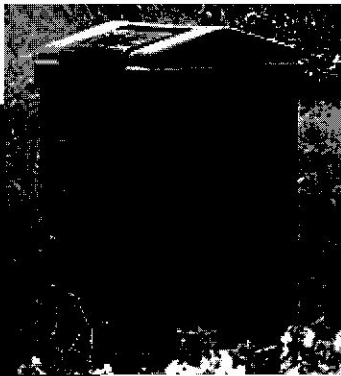
Hot composting takes more work, but you can have usable compost in about four weeks. Start out with level ground and lay boards or branches down, evenly spaced to create air circulation. Spread out several inches of high-carbon, (brown) material and add high-nitrogen (green) material and mix together. You can do this in a bucket or a pile as well. Water as necessary but don't let your pile become soggy. Too much water will harm the microorganisms, and the pile will rot and smell. The bacteria can do their best work in a mixture of 20-30 times as much brown material as green material, (carbon to nitrogen). A pile, which measures 3' x 3' x 3', works best, but don't let it get taller than 5 feet. Punch holes in the sides to let the air circulate. Your pile will heat

up and cool down, so start turning material when the temperature drops. Move the compost from the center to the outside and vice-versa, just like stirring a cake batter in a bowl. Turning every day or two will give you a finished product in less than four weeks. Turning every other week will give results in one to three months.

Here are some materials that you can safely add to your compost pile: cardboard rolls, eggshells, gray cardboard boxes, sawdust, vacuum cleaner lint, clean paper, fireplace ashes, hair, shredded newspaper, vegetable trimmings, coffee grounds and filters, fur, leaves and grass, tea bags, wool and cotton rags. Items that you would not include would be: Black walnut leaves and twigs, (they are toxic to tomato plants), egg yolks and meat scraps, (attract flies), oils and grease, (create bad odors), pesticides, (will kill microorganisms and concentrate in the compost), and pet waste, (attracts flies and may carry disease microorganisms.)

When your compost is ready to use, it will be a uniform, dark brown, crumbly material which looks and feels like rich, earthy-smelling garden soil. You need to let it cool for a few days before using it. Compost can be used to amend and enrich your garden soil and landscaping beds. It can even be used in house plant pots and window boxes. Compost enhances soil texture, increases the ability of the soil to absorb air and water, limits weed growth, helps stop erosion, and lessens the need for chemical fertilizers.

So instead of tossing those grass clippings in the river where their decomposition will add unwanted nutrients and use up oxygen needed by aquatic creatures, put them to good use to enhance everyone's environment. In nature, everything that happens is part of a cycle, and one creature's waste is another creature's food or shelter. If we think about our own home environment as part of the larger ecosystem, we can learn to use practices that are beneficial to not only our small corner, but to the whole planet that we share.



Composting can be done in simply constructed bins or in self-contained bins that are available at the local hardware store.

References: <http://www.purdue.edu>

Backyard Conservation, USDA-NRCS, NACD, Wildlife Habitat Council, (available on our website at www.summitswcd.org)