

COMPOSTING

Did you know that one third of the waste we put into our trash cans is made up of compostable matter? Once this material reaches landfills, it breaks down into 'methane' gasses, which are far more potent than even carbon dioxide.

By separating vegetables, fruit, peel and even cardboard boxes, you can gain excellent material to create your own compost pile, which will generate nutrient rich matter to fertilize your soil.

So, what exactly is compost and how does one go about creating a compost heap? Compost is the final result that occurs when hundreds of thousands of organisms such as worms, bacteria and fungi feed off the compost heap, breaking down the organic material into rich mulch that your soil will love. Composting is a man-made way of creating what nature intended. Besides producing excellent soil, making the compost creates heat which will destroy plant diseases and weed seeds in the pile.

Almost any organic material, such as vegetables, fruit, peels and even fish and meat, can be used in a compost pile. The pile needs a proper carbon/nitrogen mix. Carbon is produced from dried leaves, grass clippings, hay, straw, dead flowers and wood chips; nitrogen comes from your kitchen waste. An ideal ratio needs to be achieved, with more carbon producing substances in the mix. While using kitchen refuse, remember that meat will eventually decompose, but can also smell and attract insects. Everything you add to the pile should be chopped for quicker decomposing. Some other excellent organic compostable material includes seaweed, sawdust, tissue, peanut shells, feathers, teabags and coffee dregs. Avoid pet refuse and disposable diapers.

To collect kitchen scraps, keep a closed container in your kitchen, and remember to top it off with grass clippings, leaves or wood chips. Tip it into your compost heap on a weekly basis.

Selecting a compost site depends on the kind of area you have available, but generally, a sunny spot works well. Use a compost bin or build the pile over grass if possible, to encourage earthworms and other insects to visit it. Remember to turn it over regularly, and keep it moist, especially during hot summer days. If you want to continue composting over winter, you would need to invest in an insulated compost bin.

Compost will be created depending on the time and effort you invest in it. Once finished, it has a crumbly texture and should smell like fresh earth. Spreading on a layer over your soil, should serve as an excellent organic fertilizer, especially for your flower beds and herb gardens.

So, what do you do if you have a small garden? There are a variety of options including building a wormery. Worms eat up to half their body weight and breed rapidly too. An ideal solution for getting rid of your kitchen scraps. The wormery also produces a liquid, which when diluted makes excellent plant food. If worms are not to your liking, then you may want to try the Japanese method of Bokashi composting. By purchasing a bin and Bokashi bran (made up of

wheat bran and effective micro organisms), you can get your composting done right in your kitchen. The Bokashi juice produced is excellent as a plant nutrient.

And finally, if you don't have a garden or even a small patch of grass to fertilize, you may still want to think of composting and donating the final product to your local nursery, garden or municipality.

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