

Pay Dirt
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The end result of composting household and garden waste is like hitting pay dirt. Adding compost to your garden improves soil structure, texture and aeration. Because it produces nitrogen, potassium and phosphorous naturally, there is less need for commercial amendments. The microbial ins and outs of composting are intriguing, well, maybe not to everyone, but ecologically it is an inexpensive and 'green' practice to undertake. Composting will save on trash bills and decrease the demands on sewage treatment and landfill space.

First things first: the bin and where to locate it. A level, well-drained sunny spot is ideal to heat up the debris for faster decomposition. As for the type of bin, that depends on the amount of space available and what you may or may not want to look at. Commercially made bins and tumblers are available. Building your own is less expensive by using recycled wooden pallets and chicken wire. A 3' x 3' x 3' area is a manageable size to aim for (leave small spaces between the boards for aeration). Once the bin is set up, the fun begins.

Nitrogen (N), oxygen (O) and moisture are needed for decomposing organic waste. Green plant materials contain N (grass clippings, foliage and weeds that have not developed seeds). Add brown debris (dried plant foliage and leaves) as well as kitchen and household waste such as fruit/vegetable scraps, eggshells, nut shells, coffee grounds and filters, tea bags, vacuum cleaner dirt, dryer lint, pet fur, shredded newspaper, etc. (NO dairy, meat, poultry, fish, bones, branches [unless chipped] or pet waste). As for oxygen, frequent turning and mixing the compost with a pitchfork aerates the pile. Moisture should be added. The pile should be damp, but not saturated. Too wet and the oxygen will not get through to do its job. Too dry and the micro-organisms can't do their job. NOTE: 1) Smaller pieces (1-2") of debris decompose faster. 2) Too much of one type of waste can throw the microbial balance off, vary what you add.

Will Rogers once said, "They're making more people every day—but they ain't making any more dirt." Well, that's about to change. Go ahead, compost; make more dirt. Your garden will thank you for it.