



Composting – Why Should We Do it and How Should We Do it?

- The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 12.5% of all solid wastes are food scraps.
- 30% of all fruits and vegetables produced in the U.S. are uneaten or unused – crops on the field that are bruised, deformed or over ripe; produce in the supermarket that is not sold; fruits and vegetables in your own kitchen that become over ripe or partially eaten.
- Green wastes in landfills produce methane – which is a large component of global warming.
Composting may decrease these green wastes.
- **What is composting?** The biological decomposition of organic matter in the presence of oxygen.
- **Why add compost to your garden?** It increases organic matter, nutrients, soil structure, moisture, air spaces, beneficial bacteria, and root growth.
- Composting is a simple equation. **Compost = food sources + oxygen + water.**
- Break it down to **“browns”** and **“greens”**. Browns consist of straw, paper, leaves, sawdust (carbon compounds). Greens consist of food scraps, grass clippings, coffee grounds (nitrogen compounds).
- Key formula for adding to the compost pile: by volume, **2 to 3 parts “brown” to 1 part “green”** to yield a 30 to 1 ratio of carbon to nitrogen.
- Must add water to the pile to a “damp sponge” consistency and turn over on regular basis (to incorporate oxygen into the pile).
- Do **NOT** add these materials to the compost pile: meats, dairy products, fish, fats, oils, diseased plants, chemically treated plants, weeds gone to seed, pine needles, or walnut leaves.
- A space as small as 3’ x 3’ x 3’ could be used for the compost pile.
- The internal temperature of the pile should reach 130 degrees in order to kill weed seeds and unwanted pathogens.
- It may take 3 to 6 months for the compost pile to mature.
- The finished compost should be dark brown, crumbly and with an earthy smell.
- **What can you do with compost?** Use it as mulch, a soil amendment or as a potting mix.
- If you don’t have a garden or anywhere to put the compost, find out if your community has a green waste recycling program.