Compost

By

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I suggest using all those falling leaves in a compost pile. Compost is "a dark, friable (easily crumbled), partially decomposed form of organic matter similar in nature to the organic matter in soil". When the dead plants and leaves stay where they fall and time, bacteria and nature turn them into rich black soil.

Compost is easy to make, takes very little effort, and is highly beneficial to both garden and gardener. It is a good way to dispose of all the grass clippings, dead leaves, kitchen vegetable trimmings and other garden and vegetable by-products. Do not add non vegetable matter to the compost such as meat or meat byproducts.

Good compost starts with adding or mixing 25 parts browns with 1 part greens in a mix. The browns are made up of any dried up organic material: leaves, branches (small pieces work faster), sawdust, dry grass etc. The greens are made up of green plant materials such as: green grass, green leaves, green garden residue. To this mix you should add some soil, old compost, animal manure, so as to speed the process along, this adds nitrogen and microbes. The greens and browns should be layered or mixed in the compost pile. By adding too much greens in one layer could cause anaerobic activity which could result in a un-pleasant smell.

A compost pile should be located in a convenient location that is somewhat out of sight. The location should be near both the source of the plant material to be put in the pile and the destination for the compost. Don't put the compost pile too near trees. The tree roots are attracted to the warm, moist, rich environment, and will grow into a compost pile.

A compost pile needs to be at least three feet wide and three feet high. The pile may be loose or contained, but a contained pile is much easier to control. The container may be as simple as a chicken or hog wire fence, or may be more elaborate, such as slatted boards or cement blocks. Whatever is used, however, it is important to allow air holes in the walls of the container to allow proper air flow.

In order for the compost pile to work, it must be kept moist, but not soggy. (Soggy piles often develop unpleasant odors.) Turning or mixing the pile will also aid the decomposition process, since air is a necessary part of the mixture. If a strong ammonia odor surrounds the pile, turn it immediately. After a time the pile should heat up due to the

decomposition process, if heat is not present, the pile may need more water, more air, more nitrogen or more size. As the materials in the compost pile decompose, the pile will shrink to about half its original size. The time needed for decomposition depends largely on weather and time of year.

When the compost is ready to use, it should be dark, fine and crumbly. It should have an "earthy smell". Then the compost is ready for the garden, flower beds, or potting soils. Compost added to any soil will help alleviate PH problems, soil drainage problems, and will hold more moisture and nutrients; it also relieves soil compaction problems. Really by adding organic material to any soil is probably the single best management technique we can do. Adding Compost is better than just adding organic matter because it is in a form best suited for plants and benefitting the soil. By just adding say sawdust it takes the nitrogen out of the surrounding soil and the microbes are tied up trying to break it down for a period of time before it starts to break down then the nutrients will be released. So this fall compost all the yard waste or take it to the city waste containers or the landfill so they can make compost out of it.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan county Office
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