



Composting: Changing Garbage into Gold!

Because landfills are filling up so quickly, it is up to us to find new ways to get rid of our garbage. About 30% of all the garbage in the United States is made up of waste from food and yards. Composting is a great way to recycle household and lawn waste. This waste includes grass clippings, egg shells, and orange peels. Composting is a biological process that occurs when tiny, microscopic organisms break down old plant and other organic materials and recycle them to make new, healthy soil.

The experience of composting shows us that nature is a cycle. Things grow, die, decay, and return to the earth to help other things grow. Worms and tiny organisms help this process along by digging and eating some of the things in the dirt. "Yuck!" you say? Well, try it and you will see that organic wastes can become beautiful and healthy soil in which you can grow flowers, crops, and other plants.

Different Types of Compost Systems

There are a variety of ways to reuse or compost your organic waste. Composting can be as simple as mulching, or making a pile in your backyard, or you can make or purchase a bin. The best compost method depends on your individual needs and resources.

Mulching

Simply spread leaves and grass clippings around the base of plants a few inches from the stem. Yard trimmings work first as mulch to retain moisture then decompose into a soil amendment.

Heaps and Piles

Heap composting does not require a structure, but is simply a pile placed in your yard. Combine organic materials together in a heap/pile measuring about five feet wide and three feet tall. Materials may be added as they become available, or stockpiled until enough materials have accumulated to make a good-sized pile. Moisten the pile like a wrung-out sponge. The pile may be turned regularly, or not at all. This is the least expensive method, but if no turning is done, composting will take much longer.

Garden Trenches and Planting Spots

Burying your organic waste is the simplest method of composting. Bury the kitchen scraps at least eight inches below the surface. Fill and cover the hole. This can become a planting space for a tree shrub. In the garden lay organic materials in the valleys between rows. Cover over in the winter and use as planting rows next spring.



Compost Bins

Add organic material to the bin as it is generated. Enclosed bins keep out pests and hold heat and moisture. Each bin, whether homemade or store bought, has its own unique features.

- **Homemade Bin** - Can be made of wire, wood or used pallets. The suggested minimum size for a compost bin is 3 feet by 3 feet.
- **Circular Wire Bin** - This bin can be easily moved to turn piles or to harvest finished compost. Just undo latches, pull the mesh away from compost and set the bin up elsewhere. The pile may then be turned into the bin at its new location and compost



can be removed from the bottom. Materials needed for Circular Wire Bin (3 1/2 foot diameter) 12 1/2 feet of 1/4 inch hardware cloth, 4 metal or plastic clips, or copper wire ties. 3-4 four foot wooden or metal posts to support wire bins(optional).

- Barrel Bin - These bins can be made from plastic or metal garbage cans . Take your old 30 gallon garbage can and punch 1/2 inch holes in the can every 6 inches or so to provide air circulation.
- Block Bin - Compost bins also can be made of brick, cement blocks or rocks.

Examples Of Different Types of Compost Systems



What Can I Compost?

Landscape trimmings, certain food scraps and other organic materials are popular for composting. Refer to the following table as a guide for your compost pile:

GOOD FOR COMPOST

Grass Clippings
Yard Trimmings (old plants, wilted flowers, small prunings)
Leaves
Vegetable & Fruit Scraps
Coffee Grounds
Tea Leaves
Wood Chips
Shredded Paper (Low grade paper not acceptable for recycling)

DO NOT COMPOST THESE

Meat, Fish and Poultry (including bones)
Food Sauces
Fats, Grease, and Oils
Dairy Products
Pet Feces
Invasive Weeds
Treated Wood (or any materials containing strong preservatives or toxins)
Ashes and charcoal
Non-organics (plastic, metal, glass, etc.)

Other Good Compost References:

Master Gardener – Leon County
Leon County Agricultural Center
615 Paul Russell Road
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-7099
(850) 487-3004
SUN: 277-3003
<http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/>