

I love making Compost

By Nancy Bliss



Take those grass clippings that fill up your garbage can; the leaves that fall and have to be raked and burned - making smoke and gritty work; the vegetables in your refrigerator that you didn't get to soon enough; combine all those and turn them into lovely, dark, rich compost you can use to improve your flower beds and your vegetable gardens for free. The process can be as simple or complex as you like. I prefer simple. You will reduce the size of your garbage can, save money and time, and help save the planet. What's not to like?

First you need to choose a place. Compost likes 3 main things: air, water and heat. It can be placed in a structure (compost bin, wire cage, wood frame) or just in a heap. It should be on the ground (not concrete) where all those beneficial microorganisms, earthworms and other insects will do most of the work for you. Place it near a fence or a corner of your yard (but not next to wood or it will rot) and within easy access to water and your kitchen where it can live and breathe and decompose.

For years I used a plastic bin I purchased for my small backyard. Now I've got 3 large wooden bins with removable slats in the front for easy access. Both worked well for me. Your compost bin should have a lid or cover. Pets getting into compost can become very ill. Compost happens, the timing depends on how much effort you want to put into it. Environmental conditions like weather, mixtures of materials, shade or sun, moisture also matter. You can spend as little as a few minutes each week or 15 to 20 minutes every other day. It's entirely up to you. The finished product will take a few weeks to a few months.

The simplest way to think of making compost is mixing, by volume, half green materials, and half brown materials. Greens can be grass clippings, kitchen vegetable waste, flower and green

plant trimmings. Browns can be dry leaves, twigs, sawdust, manure like steer manure, rabbit droppings, coffee grounds. The greens provide nitrogen and water. The browns provide carbon.

Leaves, twigs and pine needles should be chopped or mowed for best breakdown. Mix the two together in fairly equal portions, with enough water to moisten, but not flow out. As you add each layer, mix lightly.

Soon the heat will begin to break down the materials, earthworms will appear like magic. Microorganisms and fungal activity will all start working for you. Ideally, the pile should be at least 3' by 3' to promote the heating activity. Occasional stirring and adding moisture when dry will facilitate the composting process. I avoid adding weeds to my compost as the seeds will not always break down.

A full compost bin with grass clippings and leaves and kitchen waste will shrink within a few days and you'll have room to add to it easily. Kitchen waste can be those vegetables that didn't make it, egg shells, vegetable trimmings, a glut of cucumbers from your garden, etc. Do not compost dairy products or meats as they attract rodents and give off odors. I add kitchen scraps regularly. Stir them into your compost to avoid attracting flies and gnats. For tools, a good spading fork for turning is very handy. A compost thermometer is an option. When my compost hits 140 degrees, I'm thrilled.

Compost can be a way to connect with neighbors as well. I get grass clippings from my neighbor and it reduces his garbage each week. A friend with rabbits, gives me their droppings and straw. I save a few bags of leaves in the fall and add them to my grass clippings in the summer. The best method is mowing the grass and leaves together, the browns break down better that way.

When your compost is a rich, crumbly brown, its ready to use. It is best to sift it, to remove sticks, possible grubs. (I confess that I just use it right out of the bin). You'll be giving your soil the best meal its ever had!

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