

LAZY PERSONS COMPOSTING



The IDEA Garden is a joint project of
Smith County Master Gardeners,
Smith County Extension Service, and
City of Tyler Parks & Recreation,
with funding by the East Texas Council of Government

COMPOSTING

Composting is nature's way of recycling organic materials (O.M.) such as yard clippings, into fertilizer/soil conditioner.

THE PROCESS

- Equal portions of water and oxygen are required by microbes which drive the process.
- Composting requires nitrogen to feed microbes. Carbon (C) to nitrogen (N) ratios (C:N) of 25:1 to 40:1 work best.
- Chipping, shredding or chopping materials into small pieces speeds composting.

THE PRACTICE

BUILDING THE PILE

1. Chip, shred or chop organic material.
2. Start with a 6" layer of organic material.
3. Moisten and add one inch of soil (microbe source).
4. Add nitrogen.*
5. Mix materials thoroughly add moisture as needed.
6. Repeating steps 2-5 above, build to height of 3' to 6'.

MAINTAINING THE PILE

1. Monitor pile temperatures and modify conditions to maintain a temperature of 85 to 115 degrees F.
2. Maintain pile aeration by turning as needed, 1-4 times per month.
3. Maintain pile moisture at the consistency of a well-wrung sponge.
4. If pile smells like ammonia, increase C:N ratio by adding woody organic material.
5. If Pile smells like rotten eggs, turn the pile and/or mix in dry organic material.

*No supplement nitrogen is required if the C:N ratio is below 40:1. If the C:N ratio is above 40:1, add one pound of actual nitrogen per fifty pounds of dry O.M. Following are C:N ratios of selected O.M. sources:

Humus	15:1	Cow manure	20:1	Pine Needles	70:1
Veg waste	20:1	Horse manure	25:1	Wood chips	200:1
Lawn clip	20:1	Oak leaves	50:1	Sawdust	500:1

Suggested amounts of nitrogen per fifty pounds of dry O.M.

<u>Fertilizer</u>	<u>% Nitrogen</u>	<u>Lbs. to apply</u>
Ammonium nitrate	33	3.0
Ammonium sulfate	21	4.8
Cottonseed meal	7	14.3
Blood meal	12	8.3

THE PRODUCT

- Finished compost is dark and crumbly, with a rich earthy smell. The original pile construction volume will reduce by approximately 50%.
- Finished compost can be used as a pre-plant fertilizer/soil conditioner or top-dress fertilizer/mulch for flowers, vegetables, groundcovers and shrubby beds.
- Incorporate 2"-3" of compost in the top 4"-6" of soil prior to planting.
- Top-dress with compost as needed to maintain a 1"-2" layer of fresh compost mulch in all your planting beds.
- Finished compost can be mixed with equal parts sand to obtain a general purpose potting soil. Most plants can be grown in pure finished compost so it's hard to use too much. Use compost until your heart's content and your plants are simply beautiful!

POSTSCRIPTS

- Wear a dust mask when turning pile to prevent inhalation of mold spores.
- Never compost pet waste.
- Cover kitchen scraps with soil/sawdust as they are added to reduce flies, animals and odors. DO NOT add kitchen scraps of animal origin.
- Cover pile when raining to prevent excessive moisture.
- Spread fire-ant bait around pile perimeter.
- Compost weeds if they have not gone to seed.
- Compost wood ashes, but not charcoal or coal ashes.
- Avoid using materials recently treated with pesticides.
- To bin or not to bin: Composting is a natural process. Bins are not found in nature. Bins are not required to compost. They can be helpful in retaining heat, regulating moisture, excluding animals and odors.