

COMPOSTING

Compost is organic material that can be used to improve soil and create a better medium for gardening. Mature compost contains a substance called humus that is dark brown or black and has a soil-like smell. It is created by combining organic wastes (yard trimmings, food wastes, manures) in proper ratios into a composting container/pile, then adding bulking agents (wood chips) as needed to accelerate the breakdown of organic materials, and finally allowing the finished material to fully stabilize and mature through a curing process. The curing process includes the production of high temperatures to destroy pathogens and weed seeds.

Compost Benefits Include:

- Suppressing plant diseases and pests.
- Reducing or eliminating the need for chemical fertilizers.
- Promoting higher yields of agricultural crops.
- Aiding reforestation, wetlands restoration, and habitat revitalization efforts by remediating contaminated, compacted, and marginal soils.
- Cleaning soils contaminated by hazardous waste in a cost-effective manner.
- Remove solids, oil, grease, and heavy metals from storm water runoff.
- Capture and destroy 99.6 percent of industrial volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) in contaminated air.
- Provide cost savings of at least 50 percent over conventional soil, water, and air pollution remediation technologies, where applicable.

Compost enriches soils

Compost has the ability to help regenerate poor soils. The composting process encourages the production of beneficial micro-organisms (mainly bacteria and fungi) which in turn break down organic matter to create humus. Humus--a rich nutrient-filled material--increases the nutrient content in soils and helps soils retain moisture. Compost has also been shown to suppress plant diseases and pests, reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, and promote higher yields of agricultural crops.

Compost helps prevent pollution & can be used to deter erosion

Composting organic materials (such as food & yard wastes) rather than sending them to the dump ultimately avoids the production of methane and leachate in landfills. Compost has the ability to prevent pollutants in storm water runoff from reaching surface water resources, and the composting process can eliminate preservatives, pesticides and other chemicals in contaminated soils. Compost has also been shown to prevent erosion and turf loss along rivers and on roadsides, hillsides, playing fields, and golf courses.

Using compost offers economic benefits

Using compost can reduce the need for water, fertilizers, and pesticides. It is a cheap & easy alternative to store-bought fertilizers & mulch. Composting also extends municipal landfill life by diverting organic materials from landfills and provides a less costly alternative to conventional methods of cleaning contaminated soil.

THE SHORT VERSION – WHY COMPOST?

- It is an easy, cheap, and environmentally friendly way of disposing of your food and lawn wastes.
- It creates a nutrient-rich, pest & weed free fertilizer for your gardens.
- You don't have to spend money on fertilizers, mulches and pesticides for your garden.
- You don't contribute as much waste to landfills and thereby reduce the amount of ozone-damaging gasses that landfills create.

HOW DO I USE THE COMPOST?

Mulch: If you are using the compost as a moisture-holding mulch, do exactly what you would do with any mulch. Spread it around plants, trees, shrubs, about 2-3 inches deep. Just like regular mulches from organic materials, it will break down over time. Just keep adding to it once or twice a year, and you'll soon have the healthiest lawn in town, as the compost continually increases the fertility of the soil.

Soil Amendment/Garden Fertilizer: If you use compost as a soil amendment, just dig anywhere from 2 to 4 inches down and then throw the compost in there, and mix it in with the rest of the soil at planting time. Your flowers, plants, or whatever you have planted there will thrive.

WHEN DO I APPLY THE COMPOST?

If your compost is still clumpy and hasn't completely broken down to create humus, it is best to add it to your garden at the end of the growing season, in the fall. You can simply spread a thick layer over your beds after your plants are done for the year. If you have a rich, humus-filled compost that has been completely processed, then you can add it to your garden beds in the spring before planting, either by layering it over the entire bed, or by placing a shovel-full in the hole before planting each plant.

What to Compost - The IN List

What NOT to Compost – The OUT List

Animal manure	Black walnut tree leaves or twigs (release harmful chemicals)
Fruits & vegetables	Coal or charcoal ash (may contain harmful substances)
Cardboard rolls & clean paper	Dairy products & eggs (create odors & attract insects & pests)
Shredded newspaper	Diseased or insect-ridden plants (may contaminate garden)
Coffee grounds & filters or tea bags	Fats, grease, lard or oils (create odors & attract insects & pests)
Cotton or wool rags	Meat or fish bones & scraps (create odors & attract insects & pests)
Dryer & vacuum cleaner lint	Pet wastes – dog/cat feces or litter (may have harmful substances)
Egg & nut shells	Anything treated with pesticides (might kill composting organisms)
Fireplace ashes	
Hair & fur	
Hay & straw	
Houseplants	
Leaves, grass & yard trimmings	
Sawdust & wood chips	

* Information provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency