Home composting will feed lawns, flowers

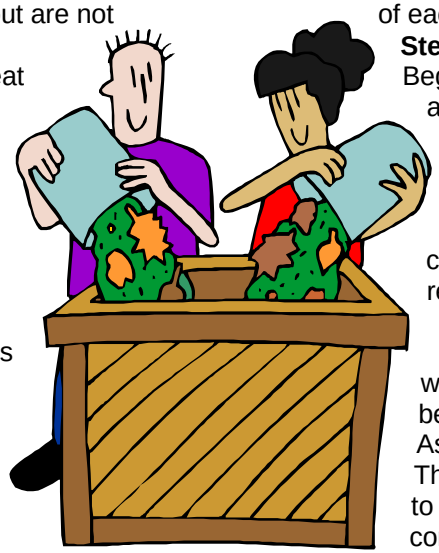
Thinking about starting a compost pile in the yard, but are not quite sure where to start? Follow these tips for a great compost pile that will ensure correct materials and a great organic fertilizer for the lawn and plants.

What is composting?

Composting is a biological process during which organic materials, such as grass and leaves, are broken down into a soil-like product. It is a form of recycling and a natural way of returning nutrients to the soil.

Why compost?

By composting kitchen and yard waste, homeowners create a free source of fertilizer. Composting also conserves valuable and limited landfill space normally used to dispose of this material.



How to compost...

Begin a compost in the yard by saving yard debris, like clippings, leaves and prunings. Add certain items from the garbage, preparing them properly and placing them in a compost pile. It is easy when the following guidelines are followed:

Step 1- Choose the right materials...

DO COMPOST: vegetable scraps, citrus rinds, egg, peanut and nut shells, lettuce leaves, apple cores, nail clippings, human hair, feathers, weeds, bark, wood ashes, horse manure, small garden clippings, leaves, stalks and stems and vines.

DO NOT COMPOST: meat, fish, fat, bones, poultry, beans, vegetable oils, dairy products and plastic or synthetic fibers.

Step 2- Select and prepare a site...

Choose a place in the yard that receives equal amounts of sunlight and shade during the day.

There are many ways to prepare a compost site, which include:

Use no enclosure at all. Simply pile the materials up keeping them in a fairly dense heap.

Assemble wooden stakes and chicken wire into a simple round enclosure for the pile.

Construct a wooden compost bin, use extra or old lumber.

Make holes in the sides and bottom of a garbage can and use it to contain the pile.

Fashion a three-sided enclosure by placing cinder blocks on top of each other. Leave the front open.

Step 3: Prepare the compost materials...

Begin by cutting or shredding the ingredients into small bits and pieces.

Then: Add enough water to keep the compost heap moist, but not soggy.

Provide adequate ventilation. To increase air circulation, turn the compost at least once a week. You can also push rods or poles through the heap and then remove them, leaving channels through which air can pass.

During rainy weather, cover the pile with a plastic sheet, wood or some other waterproof material to keep it from becoming too wet.

As the compost materials decompose, they create heat. This is natural, and when the pile is turned, you will be able to feel the heat. If your compost is properly prepared, contains no animal fats and is turned regularly, it will not attract pests or create odors.

Step 4- Test whether the compost is ready...

Decomposition will occur in about two to three weeks, depending on the materials in the pile, the size of the pile and how often it is turned.

The compost is ready for use when it is dark red, brown or black, and when the materials have broken down into small fine particles.

Step 5- Use the compost...

Sift through the compost and set aside the decomposed materials, returning the rest to the pile. Apply the decomposed matter to the garden in a layer about 1 inch to 3 inches thick. As you apply the compost, turn and mix it with the soil. It is best to apply no more than 1 pound of compost per square foot of soil.

Benefits of composting...

Composting on a regular basis decreases garbage volume by as much as 25 percent. What was wasted and sent to the landfill, taking up valuable space, becomes an important part of a garden.

For more information about composting, contact one of the following local Extension Agencies: Johnson County at 913-764-6300; Miami County at 913-294-4306; Douglas County at 785-785-843-7058 or Franklin County at 785-229-3520.

The above material was developed by Portland Metro and distributed through the Environmental Protection Agency, Region VIII. Contact the Hillsdale Water Quality Project www.hwqp.org or 913-829-9414.