

Composting Essentials

Composting is basically turning organic waste and household scraps into fresh, usable soil conditioner which contains some fertilizer elements. It also eliminates throwing away these trash materials and reduces needed space in landfills. There are no secret tricks and it is easy to do, but requires some labor.

The benefit is you do not have to fill trash barrels and you generate a lot of free organic material that is an excellent amendment to your soil. You will use grass clippings, soft leaves and soft stalks. Harder limbs and branches will take much longer to break down unless they are run through a shredder first. Household fruit and vegetable scraps are also used, but no meat products or animal waste should be mixed with your compost matter.

If your compost operation is in a warm, sunny spot, it will work a lot faster and you can have ready-to-use compost in 4-8 weeks. It is important to turn the compost frequently for optimum results, usually every 4 to 7 days. Turning the pile acts to get all aspects of the compost rotated. The middle usually heats up faster than the outside. By rotating with a pitchfork, it speeds the process and keeps the heat (which can reach 120-140 degrees) in. To increase speed, use steer manure in about 2" layers as you refill the bins. Moisture is important, too. Never keep the pile soggy wet, nor let it go too dry. It should feel like a moist sponge.

Compost bins may be many different things. Commercial (usually plastic) bins are available and easy to assemble. There are many different models, from very simple cylinder types to heavy square structures. You can build your own using other materials such as chicken wire bins, square bins made from fencing wood or even discarded pallets.

One of the easiest and simplest methods is to take a circular bin made out of chicken wire or plastic and fill it with layers of leaves, grass, stalks, household waste, etc. Remove the outside bin about every 7 to 10 days and place the empty bin next to the pile and refill with a pitchfork. Every time you work on a pile, it will get noticeably smaller. Finished compost usually takes about 4 to 6 weeks depending on temperature and contents of the bin.