

COMPOST

HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



USING WASTE TO ENRICH YOUR GARDEN

Why not use your waste to create a compost pile and enrich your garden? Compost is a safe, effective soil additive and is almost free! It costs little more than a bit of time and effort. It will also eliminate pick-ups of grass clippings and leaves.

Compost puts nutrients back into the soil. Finished compost will balance soil alkalinity by bringing the pH within the 6.5 to 7.5 range preferred by most plants. It can also provide needed moisture and air by loosening tight, compact soil. Your plants will become healthier and more insect and disease resistant while attracting earthworms, which help in any garden.

Anyone can create a compost heap, whether the needs are large or small. There are 4 basic elements for any successful compost pile: a container, compost components, additives and maintenance.



CONTAINER

A compost container can be a very simple wire cage or an elaborate bin. Almost any container can work, although it should allow air to circulate. There are many easy-to-make containers, such as a cylindrical wire cage, a wire mesh box, or by stacking timbers to create a box.

COMPONENTS

Begin your compost heap near your garden and, if possible, convenient to water. Make sure it receives 6 hours of sun a day. Lay down a bottom layer of twigs, cornstalks, hay, wood chips, or other coarse material. Follow with a layer of high nitrogen material such as grass clippings or manure. (Composting works best with a mixture of coarse and fine materials). It is best not to include meat scraps or clippings that have been sprayed with chemicals. Use organic matter in 15 cm compacted layers, alternating with 5 cm layers of manure or good loam (soil from your garden or top soil from a bag). The loam or manure provides starter bacteria for the compost. In warm weather the raw material can decompose in as little as 2 to 4 weeks. To speed up nature's process of decomposition you can use a compost accelerator. The accelerator is sprinkled on dry and used when wetting layers of your pile down. It adds nitrogen, bacteria and enzymes to your pile, therefore hastening your composting naturally.

MAINTENANCE

Once your layered compost heap is about 125 cm tall, create a bowl in the center and add water. The material will begin to decompose. Turning the compost with a pitchfork and bringing the outside edges into the center will activate all of your compost material. If the mixture becomes too soggy, the airflow is blocked and the compost may smell soured. Turning the matter will help increase the airflow. As the heap decomposes, it will shrink in size. Turning the pile once a week will enable it to be completed in about 3 weeks. If the pile doesn't seem to be composting, you may need to add a little fertilizer or manure to increase activity. When the compost no longer generates heat, it is ready to use. Finished compost should have a dark brown colour, like coffee grounds and exudes a rich, earthy smell.

A good compost works wonders for any garden as a soil additive. As a fertilizer, compost will slowly leach nutrients into the ground. Use it to improve garden soil by adding an 8 cm layer of compost, then digging it into a depth of 15 cm with a spading fork or roto-tiller. Compost can also be used as mulch around plants.

ADDITIVES

Yard waste makes up 20% of the nation's garbage. Instead of bagging for garbage pick-up, use your clippings, leaves, grass cuttings, vegetable peelings, eggshells and even coffee grounds as additives to your compost. Do not use weeds, weed roots (they can resprout), or diseased plants. Charcoal ashes are often toxic and plastics will not decompose.

CHOOSING THE SITE FOR YOUR COMPOSTER

Make sure it's flat enough so the nutrients that accumulate will not wash away, and far enough from trees so their roots will not siphon away the pile's yield.

CHOOSING THE SHAPE

Although compost piles don't require enclosures, a structure is more practical, neater and prevents material from blowing away. The type of enclosure you select is a matter of personal preference.

TYPE OF COMPOSTERS

Compost Bin
Flexible wire panels
Bricks or cement blocks
Wood frames
Plastic styled bins
Tumbler bins



AERATE THE PILE

Turn the pile with a pitchfork or aerating tool when initial heating subsides and then turn after every heat-up cycle. Move the fully composted material out of the hot centre of the pile and replace it with the partially composted material on the sides.



HELPING THE ENVIRONMENT

With composting you have just diverted about 20% of your garbage output by re-using your waste. Along with the other 2 R's (recycle and reduce), you have taken a great step forward in helping fight one of the greatest problems facing the world – overflowing landfill sites.

TROUBLESHOOTING COMPOST BINS

When compost piles aren't working properly, you'll usually notice one or more of the characteristics listed below. Most of the problems can be corrected by taking the recommended steps.

1. Pile is too dry.

Piles tend to dry out during hot sunny weather. Without adequate moisture, microorganisms cease to function and decomposition stops. Monitor the pile carefully to assure moisture is the consistency of a squeezed-out sponge.

2. Pile is too wet.

Over watering tends to compact the pile. When air cannot penetrate, it encourages anaerobic bacterial activity that results in fermentation and unpleasant odours. Turn the pile so it aerates properly and the materials dry to the consistency of a squeezed-out sponge.

3. Pile has unpleasant odour.

When the pile is over watered or packed too tightly, oxygen can't penetrate and aerobic microbes can't function. Anaerobic microorganisms take over and cause unpleasant fermentation odours. To avoid this, don't compress materials when they're added. To correct the problem, add some coarse materials and turn the pile over so it aerates properly and loses the extra moisture.

4. Pile is inactive.

Microorganisms carry out the job of decomposing organic material in a compost pile. You need a broad spectrum of these microorganisms to activate the pile and get a rapid breakdown of organic material. If the proper ones are not present, decomposition will be slow and disappointing. To avoid this, add 'Compost Accelerator'.

***Visit Humber Nurseries 'COMPOST CORNER' for a complete selection of composters and accessories.**

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