SMALL-SCALE COMPOSTING

WHAT IS COMPOST?
Composting is the managed practice of the biological breakdown of organic matter, such as leaves and coffee grinds, into a rich soil amendment called humus.
Using humus creates healthy landscapes and conserves precious landfill space.

BLEND: 3 PARTS CARBON 1 PART NITROGEN
At this 3:1 ratio, along with a steady diet, microorganisms can decompose organic material quickly. Materials should be mixed thoroughly and shredded or chopped if possible.

BROWNS: CARBON SOURCES
- Newspaper Shreds
- Straw
- Wood Chips
- Woody Prunings

GREENS: NITROGEN SOURCES
- Coffee Grounds
- Fresh Yeast/Beer Brains
- Seaweed
- Grass Clippings

THE SCIENCE OF COMPOSTING
Microorganisms, fungi, insects, worms, flies, and other creatures convert the carbon for dead plants into energy for their own growth, releasing carbon dioxide into the air. Similarly, they recycle the nutrients from the decaying plants into their own bodies and eventually back into the soil. One byproduct of this microbial activity is heat.

RESULT: HEALTHIER SOIL AND LESS WASTE

ADDING COMPOST TO GARDEN OR LANDSCAPE
- Reduces need for fertilizers and soil conditioners
- Improves moisture retention and soil structure
- Adds beneficial microbes
- Helps reduce plant diseases and pests
- Increases organic matter
- Lightens clay soils and helps sandy soil hold water

COMPOST AND FOOD SAFETY
Pathogens can be found in decaying organic matter, especially manure. A well managed compost pile (of at least 27 cubic feet) can generate enough heat to destroy pathogens. To be effective, your compost must reach a temperature of at least 131°F for 15 days, turn at least 5 times. If your compost pile is smaller than this, or if you do not manage it properly, pathogens and weed seeds can survive. Turn the pile regularly to properly aerate making sure all contents of the pile reach the middle, where heat is generated. The addition of manure is only recommended for experienced composters and should only come from animals with a plant-based diet such as chickens or rabbits.
When in doubt apply finished compost in late fall after harvesting.

HOT (FAST) COMPOSTING
By balancing food, water and air in the compost pile to favor the growth of thermophilic (high-temperature) microorganisms, compost piles heat rapidly to 120-150°F. This temperature range kills most weed seeds and pathogens, but not beneficial fungi that help plant roots absorb nutrients.

COLD (SLOW) COMPOSTING
If ideal conditions for hot composting are not maintained, microorganisms will still break down wastes. Decay will be slower, cooler, and less effective at killing seeds and pathogens. Decomposition can take from 6 months to 2 years.

DO NOT COMPOST
Diseased and invasive plant species
Chemically treated plants or grass
Poisonous plants
Meat, bones, fat, grease or dairy products
Cooked foods in sauces, butter or oil
Dog or cat feces
Treated or painted wood
Wood ash

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