

2010

Compost 101

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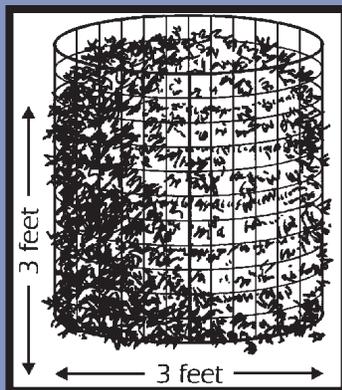
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Types of Composting Bins

There are several types of compost bins that you can make or buy. Prices for building or buying bins ranges from \$5 to \$300. Bins can be purchased from local nurseries, seed catalogs and on-line. A few examples of bins you can construct are listed below.

To construct a chicken wire bin, obtain enough chicken wire to make a cylinder three feet tall and three feet in diameter. Use strong wire to hold the ends of the chicken wire together and make the cylinder. To support



the wire cylinder, use rebar or wooden stakes. Create a base for your bin that will provide your decomposing material with adequate air flow by placing the wire cylinder on a wooden pallet or place twigs in the bottom of the cylinder about six inches deep.

Another easy composter to construct is a pallet bin. You'll need five wooden pallets. Local stores are usually willing to donate these just to get rid of them. Using one pallet as the base of the bin, stand the other four on end and connect with strong wire to make a box. Make sure that you leave one side accessible by making a simple hinge from the wire. A scrap piece of tarp held down with rocks can serve as a top to the bin, although a top is not necessary.

To construct an open trash can bin, cut the bot-

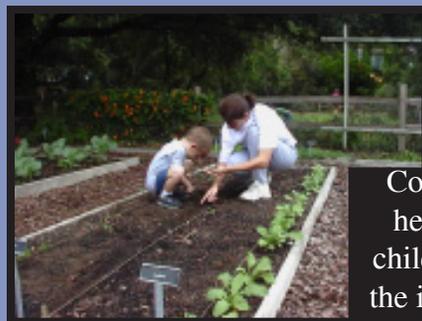
tom out of a plastic trash can. Bury the open-ended trash can about four to six inches in the ground for stability and punch several holes in it for aeration. Dump your material in and close the lid.

Filling and Maintaining Compost

To fill your compost bin, alternate brown and green materials. Keep in mind that the ideal ratio is three to one, brown to green materials. If you haven't allowed for air flow at the bottom of your bin, a layer of sticks will take care of that. If your compost smells bad, it means you have too much green material. Throwing another layer of brown leaves should take care of the smell. A recipe for compost is included below, but any mixture of organic matter will break down and eventually give you rich soil to use in your garden.

Composting Recipe:

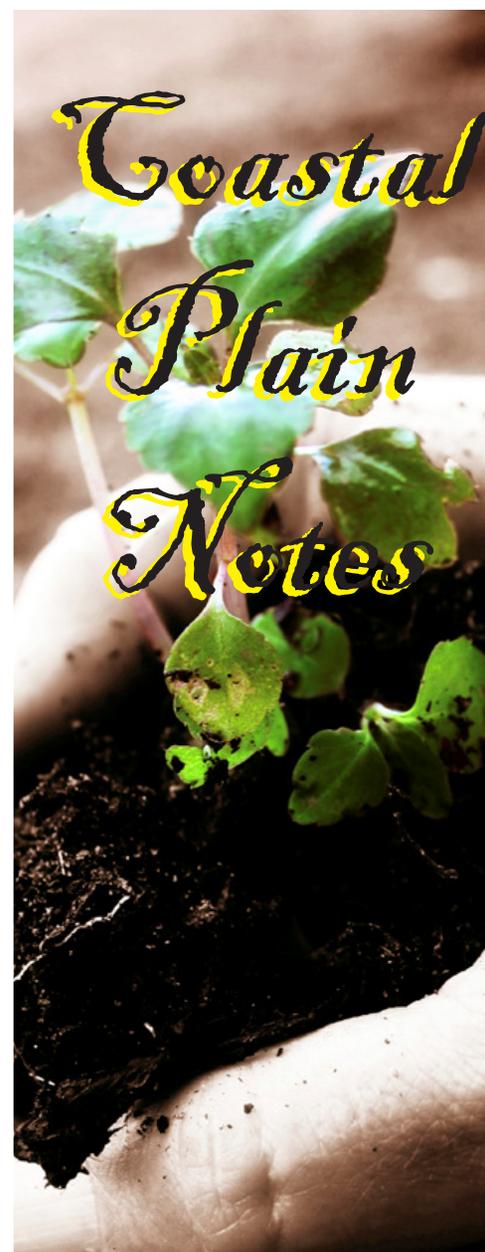
- 1 part food scraps
- 1 part grass clippings
- 1 part weeds from the garden
- 3 parts dried leaves



Composting helps teach children about the importance of recycling.

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Coastal Plain Notes

Compost 101

Turn this year's trash into next year's treasure

Georgia Southern Botanical Garden

Introduction to Composting

Composting is simply nature's way of recycling. In a natural setting, living things die and are broken down by organisms such as bacteria and fungi until they once again become soil. The nutrient-rich soil contains elements that are vital to healthy plants. Nutrients such as nitrogen, carbon, potassium, calcium and phosphorous are all found in the soil, or compost, that is created in this way.

Unfortunately, nature can be quite slow at creating compost, and gardeners want to have the nutrient-rich soil for their vegetables and flowers as quickly as possible. The good news is that you can do quite a few things to help speed up the process. Composting not only provides nutrients to your plants, but also improves the soil structure and reduces soil erosion. Compost also gives soil aeration and water retention properties that are ideal for growing vegetables and flowers.

By composting, you are recycling and therefore reducing the amount of solid waste that goes into landfills. Your efforts improve your garden as well as the health of the environment. Your finished product should be dark, crumbly soil that is rich with nutrients and organic matter.

Composting helps reduce the amount of solid waste going into landfills.



What Type of Composter are You?

In order to successfully create compost, you will need all of the following ingredients: a composting bin or area, green materials, brown materials, water, air and organisms. There are several methods of composting. Some require more work from the gardener and produce compost more quickly. Others take very little effort but take longer to form compost. No matter which way you choose to go about it, you will get compost. Your method will simply determine how quickly you get a return on your efforts.

Some gardeners construct or purchase a bin, use the 'dump and go' method for adding materials and enjoy the compost whenever it is ready, which may be up to two years from when the bin is started.



Other gardeners construct or purchase a bin, collect all the necessary layers, put them into the bin a layer at a time, seal off the bin and have usable compost in as little as a month. Some of these "dedicated" composters have several sealed bins going at once to ensure compost all year long. A suggestion is to seal one bin and have another open bin that gets the 'dump and go' additions.



Elements of Compost

The first thing you will need to do is to decide what type of compost bin you will have. See the adjacent panels of this brochure for information on different types of bins. Second, you will need materials to fill your bin.

There are two types of materials that you should use to fill your compost bin. The first type is brown material and should make up one-half to two-thirds of the total material in the bin. Brown material provides carbon and includes things like dead leaves and straw. The second type is green materials and should make up less than half of the total material in your bin. Green material provides nitrogen and consists of lawn clippings, fruit and vegetable parts, egg shells, cooked pasta, coffee and tea filters and grounds, bread and paper towels.

Avoid putting meat in your compost bin to prevent unwanted animals from visiting. Also, manure from animals such as cows, pigs and chickens is a nice addition to any compost mix, but never include feces from animals that eat meat such as cats and dogs. It may contain disease carrying pathogens.

If you build your compost bin correctly, the air, water and organisms will take care of themselves. As a rule of thumb, though, composting material should be as moist as a squeezed sponge.