

REACH Good Health News – June 1, 2020

Both quotes today are related to nature and are meant to be motivational and “a call for action” on everyone’s part. We can ALL make a difference! The first quote is *“When life throws you a rainy day, play in the puddles”* Winnie the Pooh and the second one, *“The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else can save it”*, Robert Swan.

Hopefully, we’ve all taken advantage of the lovely rain and glorious warmth this past week. Lots of people are now gardening and one important way to help the soil and recycle your kitchen waste---anything organic, like carrot peels, egg shells, coffee grounds, etc. is to make COMPOST in your own backyard. It’s often called “Gardener’s Gold”!

COMPOSTING 101 or the Best Method of Composting for Beginners

Simply buy a bin online or at a local hardware store (we’ll do a cost comparison at the end) and add all your organic materials to it. Overtime, everything breaks down. If you look inside and everything is wet and slimy or stinky, then you need more brown materials to balance it out. If it’s just a dry pile of brown things, then you need more nitrogen rich materials, like vegetable scraps and fresh green grass clippings to heat it up. That’s all there is to it!



However, you CANNOT use waste from dogs, cats, humans, pigs. Meats and meat-based fats should NOT be composted. When home composting, very thick and heavy waste matter (wood chips, cardboard, office paper, etc.) is also not a good idea in a compost heap, unless you plan to allow a lot of time (maybe years) for it to break down into soil through the decomposition process.

Compost Needs 5 Basic Ingredients:

- 1) Carbon rich materials (brown) such as leaves, straw, bark, paper, corn stalks etc.
- 2) Nitrogen rich materials (green), such as grass clippings, vegetable scraps, or coffee grounds.
- 3) Water
- 4) Oxygen
- 5) Microorganisms, such as bacteria, molds, fungi

Compost Bins and Piles

Compost bins and piles are the 2 most popular ways of composting. They are roughly the same idea, thou bins can definitely be a time-saver when composting, while piles can be almost unlimited in size. Bothe use the same principle of adding material to the compost “heap” (be it in bin or a pile) and stirring it occasionally to keep it distributing, so the central core of the compost heats up and it does its composting magic!

Most compost bins, piles or tumblers (round, spin a few times a week...I have one right beside the back steps in the winter, so I can just step outside and deposit the egg shells, peels, etc.) are built to have the compost contained and then stirred by either turning it over with a pitch fork or by turning the bin itself (tumbler). The stirring mixes the air, adding oxygen into the mix and moves the processed material out and fresh carbon and nitrogen into the center. The middle of the compost pile can be 135 to 150 degrees Fahrenheit.

In general, the larger the pile or bin is, the better it works. Sit it on bare earth or grass, preferably with some shade to make retaining moisture easier. Air is important to the decomposition process, so try to use a base

that will provide an updraught: boards over a trench, with gaps for the air to circulate, or perhaps a pallet or upturned plastic crate.

Examples of prices are FCMP Tumbling Composter, with 2 chambers, \$99.00 (Home Depot), 50 Gal. Wheeled Compost Tumbler, \$195.00, (Home Depot), 82 Gal. Composter Enviro World, \$79.97, Walmart

Cover it so that rain does not wash away the nutrients, and if the compost becomes too dry, water to revive the microorganisms and speed up decomposition. When your bin is full, leave for at least six months, preferably a year, and start another.

You can tell when compost is ready by its dark, almost black color. Compost should not smell (this could mean it is too wet and still rotting). None of the original ingredients (carrots, egg shells, etc.) should be visible.

Happy gardening and composting!

