

## Day 8: Compost: Because a rind is a terrible thing to waste.

Composting is a recycling activity, but it is so important it gets a "day of its own". Americans send a tremendous amount of organic material to landfills. This is like taking hundred dollar bills and burying them in the ground! How smart is that? Our city destroys wealth every time a load of compostable waste heads to the dump. Burying compostable materials in landfills is a Crime Against Nature.

Making compost is not as complicated as some people think. Today I will talk about three ways to compost.

### Your Basic Very Easy Compost Pile

Select a place for a compost pile, and dig the ground up a bit. Put down a layer of twigs and small branches, and then make alternating layers of "brown and dry" materials and "green and wet" materials. Brown and dry can include leaves, shredded tree limbs and bark, newspapers (no shiny slick papers or colored inks), brown cardboard, dried grass clippings. Green and wet includes kitchen scraps, green lawn trimmings, green leaves, flowers, weeds, plants, etc. Some folks say "no fats or meats in the pile," but I put fats and meats in our pile and they do just fine. Sometimes varmints dig the pile a bit to find such bits, but that just helps mix and turn the pile without my effort, so that's fine with me.

Wet each layer (so it is like a wrung out sponge) and toss a shovel of soil on each layer and a couple of small branches. Pile it up at least 3 feet high and 3 feet wide, & then leave it alone for a year. If it's a dry summer, water it so it stays damp inside (like a wrung out sponge). After about a year, rake away the leaves still on top, and inside will be a nice, rich, dark loamy compost that smells like forest dirt when you sniff it.

If you can't wait a whole year, you can make compost faster by fussing with it a bit. Every week or so go out and "turn it", that is to say, use a pitchfork and move the compost to a different spot, so that what was "outside" on the pile is now inside, and what was inside is now on the outside.

If the compost heap starts to smell bad, something's wrong, probably either too much "wet and green" or it has somehow gotten so compacted that air can't get in. For the problem of too much wet and green, add more brown and dry. If the pile has become compacted, then stir it up a bit and add some small branches (the purpose of the branches is to keep the pile from compacting and to help air circulate).

If you dig into the pile, you will find lots of little creatures at work, roly pollies, worms, etc. That's good, because that's what's supposed to happen.

## Compost In Place

An alternative to compost piles is to compost in place - make small compost piles at the places you want to fertilize (garden beds, around trees and fruit bushes, etc.) Sometimes with a compost pile nutrients are leached into the ground by rain. You can avoid this problem by allowing the compost process to happen at the places you want to fertilize. The process is the same as described above, only instead of building piles about 3 feet tall, you want layers that add up to about 6-8 inches. This avoids the work of transferring finished compost from piles to beds. It supports a properly functioning oxygen-ethylene cycle in the soil. Micro-organisms in the soil grow on plant roots and deplete the soil of oxygen. Ethylene then forms at those sites, and this de-activates (but does not kill) the soil micro-organisms. As a result demand for oxygen decreases and thus oxygen diffuses back into the soil. This awakens the soil micro-organisms that commence work and the cycle is repeated. This cycle is critical to the ability of plants to make use of the nutrients in the soil. Composting in place facilitates the process.

## Vermicompost

A third way of composting is using red wiggler worms. Worms indeed can eat your garbage and give you gifts of wonderfully fertile worm castings and worm tea. More information about vermicomposting can be found at:

<http://www.wormdigest.org>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vermicompost>

Vermicomposting is a great choice for apartment dwellers who may not have a place outdoors to do composting. The worm castings can then be used to make potting soil for growing herbs, vegetables, and other plants indoors or on patios and walkways.

If you want a nice garden, the place to start is by building your soil. No chemical fertilizer has the advantages of home made compost, & it has the added benefit of recycling your food waste, lawn & garden trimmings on site, rather than sending them off to be buried wastefully in a landfill. Composting is the beginning of a beautiful home garden. Help stop Crimes Against Nature! Start your compost pile this week! Remember: a rind is a terrible thing to waste.

For more information check out:

[www.bettertimesinfo.org](http://www.bettertimesinfo.org)

[www.energyconservationinfo.org](http://www.energyconservationinfo.org)