



COMPOSTING EL DORADO NURSERY STYLE

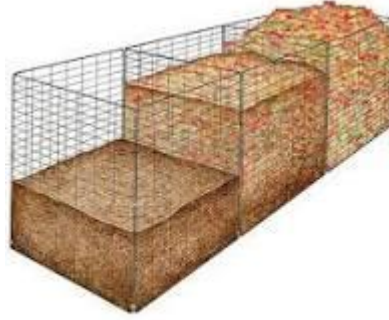
Without a doubt compost is the most important thing you can add to nourish your garden soil. Compost is created when organic matter decomposes. Organic matter eventually reaches a point where it can no longer decompose; it is at that point that it becomes an extremely nutritious and long-lasting fertilizer. Garden compost can be produced using four very basic ingredients: carbon, nitrogen, air and water. You can gather these ingredients easily by collecting yard and kitchen waste, but waiting for full decomposition is a lengthy process that can take a year or more. Composting requires a number of steps, but the resulting product can be a very useful agricultural tool.

Use these steps to make compost for your garden. You need the following four to make it work.

- Nitrogen is green material such as grass clippings, landscape trimmings, weeds, coffee grounds, leaves, tea bags, veggie/fruit scraps or peelings; manure from herbivores such as cows, horses, rabbits, fowl, goats.
- Carbon is brown material such as dry twigs, bark, brown leaves, paper, winery waste, beer making waste, dried plant material, pine needles, straw, animal shavings/bedding.
- Water - the main reason piles do not work is they get dried out! The pile should be as moist as a damp sponge. 40-60 % moisture content is optimal. The best way to add water to your pile is to water it as you turn it and water it after you add more stuff. In the wet months, you may need to cover your pile with a tarp to keep it from getting too wet. In the dry months, you may need to water it on a regular basis. If it is not decomposing it is probably too dry.
- Air is needed for the pile to break down. The bacteria and fungi living in your pile need oxygen to live, without it they will die and the pile will get very smelly. Turning and fluffing the pile will add oxygen and keep it active. A hot pile will also kill off many weed seeds.

DO NOT ADD HUMAN OR CARNIVORE WASTE TO YOUR PILE. This can spread disease and become downright smelly.

What size or type of pile is going to work for you? There is no set rule for determining pile size. The standard pile is at least 3ft by 3ft (one cubic yard). Your pile size will depend on your yard size, your gardening style, how much time you have, and how physically active you can be. If you have a large yard you may be able to have a big pile that you allow to break down over time or more than one pile. There are pre-made bins/ composters to make it easier (plastic, fabric), plans for making bins, you can use cattle fencing or wood pallets to make a 3-sided area to hold your pile. Some people like to have two piles - one that is “cooking” and one to add stuff to often.



Creating your pile - It is helpful to have a layer of “sticks or branches” to let oxygen circulate at the base of your pile. Your pile will break down faster if you layer green/nitrogen and brown/carbon – taking time to moisten the layers. Layers can be 6 inches or so. Large sticks and branches will break down faster if they are smaller chunks. A great way to get a good mixture of brown/green waste is to rake your fall leaves, put them on the lawn and mow them up. If you are going to let your pile sit and slowly break down the layers will do the work for you. Turn the pile every so often and add green waste to keep it hot. If you plan on using a tumbler or turning your pile often the layers will get mixed up but the pile will still break down. Check the moisture content often and as the pile breaks down and gets darker add more green waste.

In the perfect compost world a well-managed pile should break down in a few months and provide you with yummy nutritious black and crumbly compost. Some piles will break down more slowly. Compost is ready to add to your garden when it looks like black gold, rich and crumbly.

Remember – “Feed the soil, and the plants take care of themselves!”