



COMPOSTING WORKSHOP

The hands on easy way to learn composting and become a
"Soil –Alchemist "
Turning kitchen scraps into "gardener's gold".

Composting is a simple way to add nutrient-rich humus which fuels plant growth and restores vitality to depleted soil.

It's also free, easy to make and good for the environment.

Using compost in your garden binds the soil, increases nutrients and helps it to hold water and air. As a result your plants will grow better.

Compost is the single most important supplement you can give your garden soil.

Another very simple way to nourish your garden is with a version of liquid fertiliser made by worms.

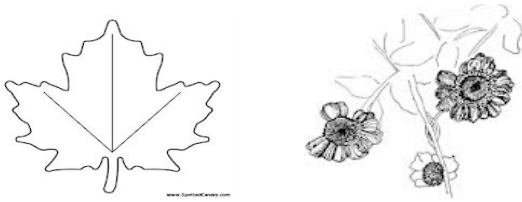
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There are many different ways to make compost, so choose a method that suites you and the amount of waste that you have and the size of your garden.

Most organic materials that rot or decay easily will make good compost. Good food for the soil is anything that lived and can decay.

You may use the following ingredients:

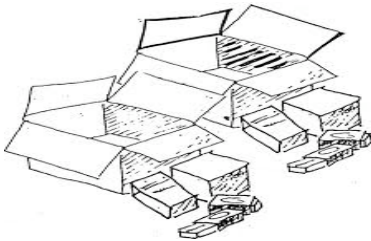
Garden waste such as cuttings leaves and dead flowers.



Vegetable and fruit peelings. Also any green, fresh cuttings from the garden and grass cuttings.



Paper, cardboard, sawdust and wood shavings.



Animal manure (no dog, cat or human!), wood fire ash, soil and seaweed.



COMPOST ::

The first step is to gather all the ingredients. Start a couple of weeks beforehand collecting garden clippings, weeds and sticks. It is better when the material is diverse and full of different kinds of plants. Grass works well, but make sure that it is not congealed. Allow it all to dry.

The next component is inorganic minerals in the form of soil, rock dust, lime and ash. These add valuable nutrients to the compost. The soil adds micro-organisms to the heap.

Collect kraal manure; this can be in the form of chicken, cow, pig or horse manure. Cow dung is the most valuable when it comes to soil fertility and human health.

The final ingredient is green matter, collected on the day of compost making. You will need an equal amount of wet and dry material.

The next step is to build the heap. Find a warm place, protected from howling winds and hot sun; directly onto the soil is best, so that microbes and creatures can move into it. Build the first layer from sticks and branches, this allows the heap to breathe from underneath. Then start to layer with the collected materials: 10cm of dry material, 10cm wet material, a thin layer of manure, a dusting of ash, lime or rock dust and a thin layer of soil. Don't worry if you cannot get ash, lime or rock dust, build the heap anyway. Once you have used all the material your heap is complete. You can build a small heap and add to it at a later stage.

Before covering the heap, drive thick sticks into it to create holes for air to penetrate. Then cover the heap with grass, straw or hessian to protect it from drying out. Protect the heap from heavy rain, by placing a plastic sheet over it.

Monitor the moisture levels. If the heap seems to dry, give it some water. The temperature will rise within the heap, take note of this. After a week or two it will drop, it is then time to turn the heap by simply forking it upside down. Cover the heap and keep on watching. You may need to turn it one more time. Your compost is ready once the temperature has subsided, and you are left with a soft, brown, fine material. It must be dug in as soon as possible as it is full of creatures that will die if left exposed.

MULCH

Dry plant material, not yet decomposed, is applied to the top of the soil and acts as a blanket providing shelter to the soil habitat below. It is slowly eaten away and decomposed by the millions of creatures that are present in well-cultivated soil.

An effective and natural way of boosting the microbial life and nutrients where plants are established is by watering the soil with nourishing teas.

There are lots of teas that can be made from various plants and manure. We are going to focus on compost and worm tea.

WORM FARM:

Most are built as a special layered container, although, you can put them into your own modified pot. This pot should be raised with a hole at the bottom and must have a lid. The red tiger worm or european red wiggler is best suited to captive life. They are usually carnivorous, feeding on micro-organisms that break down vegetable waste that is put into the worm farm on a regular basis. Feed the worms slowly in the beginning. This allows for the micro-organisms to build up in the soil, which is what the worms feed on. Add torn up bits of card-board is important (with no ink on them) to the bin in small quantities, this ensures a food source for the tiny microbes that feed on the cardboard. *It is said that an earthworm will consume half its body weight per day.*

Overtime the castings will build up. They are rich in nutrients and microbes, and it is the liquid that leaches through these casting that we collect and then water into the garden.

Use this tea, at a ratio of 1:7 (1 part worm tea, 7 parts water), once a month to feed vegetables and plants.

The castings are emptied out when they have built up into a thick layer and fill the container. This vermicompost is brilliant food and can be mixed into the soil before planting.

COMPOST TEA:

Find a barrel (blue plastic ones work well) and put a tap at the bottom. Take a hessian type bag; fill it with sea weed, comfrey, yarrow, cow, horse or chicken manure. Preferably use cow manure as a base, and add either comfrey or seaweed, or all of them at the same time. Tie the bag at the top with string, place it in the barrel, fill the barrel with water. Place the lid on top and let it brew for 3 weeks. Then water the garden with 1part fertiliser 7 parts water.

Reference : * Source: Earthartist by Jenny Louw and Growing Green Handbook by Food & Trees for Africa

A team of enthusiastic experts is available to answer your questions about composting, green living and to inspire you to begin recycling.

Visit www.thrive.org.za or email info@thrive.org