The Art of Composting
Everyone should have a compost pile!
Composting Benefits

• Reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers.
• Promote higher yields of agricultural crops.
• Reduces the need for water, fertilizers, and pesticides.
• Extends municipal landfill life by diverting organic materials from landfills.
• The average US. Household generates 650 lbs. of compostable materials each year.
Data

• Over 60 percent of what we put in our landfills is organic waste, such as food scraps. Yard trimmings, and paper, much of which could be recycled by composting.
Leaves

• The leaves of one large shade tree can be worth as much as $50 of plant food and humus. Pound for pound, the leaves of most trees contain twice as many minerals as manure.
Composting saves money. Families reduce their garbage collection bills and municipalities save money on transporting and disposing of waste when organic materials are eliminated from the collection system.
More $$$

- Compost improves soil, adds important nutrients for plants, and reduces the need for expensive commercial fertilizers.
• Healthy soil has more microorganisms in a teaspoonful of soil than there are humans alive on the planet.
SPONGE!

• Adding organic matter such as compost to soil improves its water-holding capacity. An acre of soil can hold an additional 16,000 gallons of water for every 1 percent of organic material added.
Getting Started

• Obtain a bin or an area in your yard that is approximately one cubic yard (3'x3'x3'). Size is important for the proper temperature.
Size Limits?

- Piles that are too small cannot hold enough heat for effective microbial activity, and piles too large (more than 5 feet cubed) do not allow for enough air to reach microbes in the center of the pile.
• Mix two parts brown (dry leaves, small twigs, straw, etc.) with one part green (grass clippings, kitchen scraps, etc.). This 2:1 ratio provides the best mix of carbon (brown materials) to nitrogen (greens).
• Chop or break up any twigs and large pieces of fruit and vegetable waste. Materials will break down more quickly with increased surface area.
Keeping Moisture Up

• Keep it moist. Water your compost to keep it moist like a wrung-out sponge.
Maintaining

• Keep it turning. Compost needs air. Turning the compost will help it break down and will prevent it from smelling unpleasant.
Ready to Use

• When it is ready your compost should look and smell like rich soil.
• Use finished compost to feed your garden, flowers, potted plants and lawn.
Pile it on!

- Traditional composting advice is to have a ratio of 2 parts brown, or dry, ingredients to 1 part green, or moist, ingredients. Composting expert Barbara Pleasant, in a "Mother Earth News" article, advises against making composting too complicated. Just pile it all together and keep it moist. An easy way to add moisture is to arrange a soaker hose in a figure 8 pattern on top of the pile.
Layers work well...

- Brown Material
- Green Material
- Brown Material
- Green Material
- Leaves, Twigs, Sticks
Speeding it up...

• As decomposition proceeds, the microbial activity can build up heat to 150 degrees Fahrenheit inside the compost pile. You can speed up decomposition in a compost pile by manually turning the pile over, getting usable compost in about three to six months rather than in two years for unturneded piles.
Odor

• The most common problem is unpleasant, strong odors which are caused by lack of oxygen in the compost due to overloading with food waste so that the food sits around too long, and the bin contents become too wet.
Earthworm Exodus

- Worms have been known to crawl out if conditions are wrong for them. If the moisture level seems alright, the bedding may be too acidic. This can happen if you add a lot of citrus peels and other acidic foods. Adjust by adding a little garden lime and cutting down on acidic wastes.
Fruit Flies

- Fruit flies can be an occasional nuisance. Discourage them by always burying the food waste and not overloading. Keep a plastic sheet or piece of old carpet or sacking on the surface of the compost in the bin.
Grass Clipping to Leaves...

• A wide variety of materials can go into a compost pile. It's helpful if you don't put thick layers of any one ingredient on the pile at once. Instead, put thin layers of diverse ingredients or just a wide variety in one layer.
What to keep out

• Bones, meat, eggs (egg shells are okay), cheese, and other dairy products or oils should be thrown in the garbage. Excrement from dogs and cats should also be kept out.
Compost Bin Gallery
The Simple Pile
Recycled Pallets
Hog Wire Panels
The Barrel
The 3 bin method
The Planting Bed
COMPOST BIN

~ loads from the top
~ made with thinner plastic
~ minimal aeration
~ large volume per footprint
~ empties from lower ports
~ has no bottom
The Rustic Bin
Rustic...
Rustic...
Temporary Cardboard
Wire Bins
Wire Bins
Kitchen Bin
Stonework
Combo
Simple Frame
Sure, I keep a compost pile, or as some call it, my refrigerator.

Did something just move?