

Labyrinth Community Garden

Compost Guidelines

Introduction

The material in the compost bins will have three stages, separated into individual bins:

1. **'Feed Me'** You can ADD TO THIS PILE ANY TIME, just keep it level and cover up the green stuff; keep it moist.
2. **'Still Cooking'** This pile has been turned at least once. DO NOT ADD ANY MORE NEW MATERIAL. Keep it wet and stir it now and then; it is still cooking and should be hot in the middle.
3. **'Finished'** This pile is DONE COOKING. The material has been turned and stirred and is fully decomposed. It's ready to sift and be used for Common Area plantings. Unfortunately, we won't be able to generate enough compost for every gardener, so it will be designated for common areas.

Adding to and Maintaining the Compost Bins

1. LAYER IT (adding material to the 'Feed Me' pile)
 - a. Alternate layers of fresh green stuff (cut to lengths of 4-6 inches to speed decomposition) with dry stuff (bagged leaves, shredded paper and grass clippings) and layer in a sprinkling of compost from the "Still Cooking" Pile to start the new pile cooking. Always cover new additions of wet or green materials with leaves and/or dirt to discourage flies and smells, and retain heat and moisture.
 - b. Level it. As you build it, take each layer flat. This allows water to soak in and speeds up the composting.
 - c. Water each layer well as you build it. Dry leaves absorb a huge amount of moisture and will just sit there for months if they aren't thoroughly soaked.
2. KEEP IT WET (all piles)
 - a. Pour a watering can full of water on the pile when you come to do your gardening if it hasn't rained recently. A compost pile can rot in as little as a month or as long as a year.
3. STIR IT UP (all piles) –
 - a. Drive a pitchfork repeatedly into the pile and pry up a little. Compost needs to breathe to keep cooking. A long stake or pole works too; just stick it into the pile as deeply as possible over and over.
4. TURN IT
 - a. Always turn the pile into the bin to the right.
 - b. Keep it level.
 - c. Turn the material so that the new pile is created one layer at a time. Water between each layer.
 - d. The Site and Safety Committee will turn the compost at least three times during the cooking process. This breaks up the clumps, evens out the moisture and speeds up the process.

Do Not Compost These Things

Specific Types of Plant Material

- Stubborn garden plants: Bermuda grass and nut grass are examples of plants or weeds which will see the compost heap as a great place to grow rather than decompose.
- Diseased plants: Trash them instead. You don't want to transfer fungal or bacterial problems to whatever ends up growing in your finished compost.

Specific Types of Food Waste

- Bread products: This includes cakes, pasta and most baked goods. These are pest magnets.
- Meat products: This includes bones, blood, fish, and animal fats. Another pest magnet.
- Milk products: This includes milk, cheese, yogurt, and cream. More pest magnets.
- Cooking oils: These smell like food to animal and insect visitors. It can also upset the compost's moisture balance.
- Rice: Cooked rice is an unusually fertile breeding ground for the kinds of bacteria you don't want in your pile. Raw rice also attracts varmints.
- Walnuts: These contain juglone, a natural aromatic compound toxic to some plants.

Other Types of Material

- Horse and cow manure: These have a high risk of being contaminated with herbicide from the hay the animals are fed.
- Pet waste: This is a health risk. Avoid kitty litter as well as the waste itself.
- Heavily coated or printed paper: This includes magazines, catalogs, printed cards, and most printed or metallic wrapping paper. Foils don't break down, and we don't want exotic printing chemicals in our compost.
- Plastic bags: You can carry your kitchen scraps to the compost pile in a plastic bag. Just be sure to take the bag with you when you leave.
- Sawdust: So tempting. But unless you know the wood it came from was untreated, stay away.