

## Home Composting Tips

Composting your yard waste at home can be an easy addition to your gardening practices or a major hobby. Watch for the newspaper for announcements on free home composting workshops in the county.

The magic of compost is in the micro-organisms that do the work of breaking down the materials. They are present in the soil and on the yard waste. You do not have to purchase them in a package. Just give them a balanced diet, a bit of water and air, and away they'll go turning yard waste into compost... a priceless soil amendment. As the tiny guys do their work, they will be joined by millipedes, beetles, and earthworms to further break down the materials.

The best compost comes from a mixture of materials. Just as humans need a balanced diet, so do the compost critters. They like a mixture of green materials (like weeds, spent flowers, grass clippings) and brown materials (like dried leaves, straw, dried grass, sawdust, wood chips.) Equal parts by weight is the ideal...green materials tend to be wet and heavy, while brown materials are dry and light, so the volume of brown materials will be larger.

Think of your compost pile more like a salad than lasagna. Chopping the materials will give the compost critters more surfaces to work on and mixing the materials will incorporate air into the mix which will help to keep it from being stinky. Stinky compost is due to anaerobic decomposition. If it smells, mix in more brown, dry materials. (Heavy wet grass clippings really need dry leaves or straw to make good compost.)

Keep your compost heap as moist as a wrung out sponge. Dry compost piles will take many years to break down. Piles that are too wet, however, also take longer to rot and they are stinky to boot! Sprinkle the layers with water as you mix them. Cover with burlap bags or a tarp to keep the moisture in during the hot months and to shed excess water in the wettest months... most of the year just let the rain keep it damp and active.

Compost bins keep the materials tidy but an open pile works well also. Plans for building bins are available from Skagit County Public Works 360-336-9400. Plastic bins are available through garden stores and catalogues. A simple bin can be built using 10 feet of hardware cloth with 2 x 4's stapled to the ends. Turn it into a circle, tie the ends together with wire and pile in the materials.