

The World's Most Popular
Compost Guide!

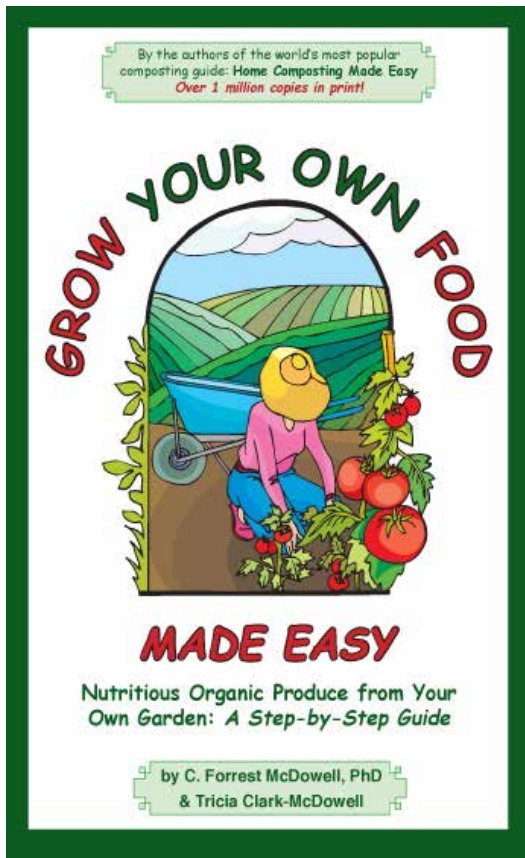
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Home Composting Made Easy



By C. Forrest McDowell, PhD & Tricia Clark-McDowell

Over 1/2 Million in Print!



**Grow Your Own Food Made Easy:
Nutritious Organic Produce from Your Own Garden —
A Step-by-Step Guide**

by C. Forrest McDowell, PhD & Tricia Clark-McDowell
Cortesia Press, Eugene, Oregon (68 pp, full color)

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Bulk pricing is available for all our publications.

For extensive information & resources about home composting, visit our
website: www.homecompostingmadeeasy.net

SAY GOODBYE TO YOUR WASTE!

Congratulations! By choosing to compost and engage in home waste management (reducing, reusing and recycling) you have joined millions of like-minded people around the world. In fact, you can divert from landfills over 80% of your total residential waste (35% alone just by composting!). Join us and the folksy character, Professor Rot, as we show you how simple home composting really is.

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Graphics Credits:

We are grateful to the following for the hodgepodge of graphics that appear in this educational guide. If we did not give credit where it is due, oops! Let us know.

Tricia Clark-McDowell (what an active imagination!)

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What is Compost?

Many gardeners call compost “Black Gold.” When optimally created it is rich, dark brown or black. Perhaps you’ve never inhaled its freshness, like moist earth in Spring. And what about its texture? - coarse and crumbly where all the original ingredients now look and feel about the same. Are you starting to get the picture? - this is good stuff!



When you get to know finished compost, you will be amazed that at one time it was yucky food scraps, a dead house plant, a matted pile of grass clippings or leaves that you threw into your bin. The finished product won’t disgust you, it will make you feel quite proud!

You are proud because you did your part to enlist the aid of billions of microbes. You gave them housing (your compost bin) and plenty of food in the form of sugars and proteins (your yard and kitchen waste). You made sure they got adequate air and moisture. And, you were kind enough to check in on them once a week or so (the walk outside did you good, right?). The microbes did the rest - engaging in a feeding frenzy that generated so much heat that they literally ate themselves out of house and home, leaving behind in your bin, yes, you guessed it, freshly decomposed organic matter called compost.

The fact is, decomposition happens in nature all the time: materials, fruit, plants, weeds, stems, twigs, critters, microbes, etc. die and decay. The remains eventually are absorbed into the soil and the nutrients are used by living roots, fungi, and other microorganisms. It takes nature years to make just one inch of humus-rich soil. Your composting efforts can consistently yield mighty fine tilth in just a fraction of the time - a few weeks to a few months! All to be used in your yard, garden, and for houseplants. What a wonderful partnership with nature - give her your waste and get back nutrient-rich organic matter in the form of compost.

Think of compost as an investment in the soil and plants in and around your home. The “bank” is nature. Your investment is compost (“black gold”). The dividend is a cleaner, healthier planet.

Benefits of Using Compost

Your choice to compost has incredible benefits for you, your yard, home, and the earth. The waste stream out of your home can lessen by as much as 35% just by composting kitchen and yard waste.

Saves \$ and Resources

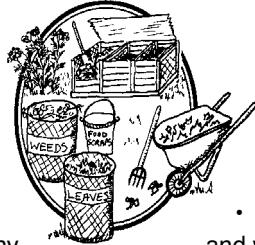
- Less garbage means lower garbage bills
- Fewer costly dump-runs
- Free soil additive and natural fertilizer
- Lower water bills when used as soil much
- Lessens the burden on landfills

Makes You Feel “Green”

- You feel proud about doing your part to conserve earth’s resources.
- You’re protecting & improving your home environment
- You gain some neighborhood notoriety for your efforts
- You’re adding to a sustainable future

Improves Soil

- Returns nutrients to the soil such as phosphorus, potassium, nitrogen, and many trace minerals, all to be released slowly over 1-2 years for optimal plant growth & health
- A natural fertilizer that improves soil aeration, tilth & drainage



Valuable Mulch

- Promotes weed and erosion control
- Protects plant roots from sun and wind damage
- Conserves water
- Increases water retention when absorbed into loose or sandy soils; aids drainage in clay or other heavy soils
- Reduces soil diseases

Keep Nature Employed!

- **COMPOSTING** is a good way to recycle yard waste such as leaves, twigs, grass clippings, most weeds, and dead houseplants. It is also a clever way to dispose of most food scraps and unwanted leftovers so that your refrigerator doesn’t become the compost bin. In your compost bin the unemployment rate is very low!
- **COMPOSTING** is a means of harnessing a host of highly beneficial microorganisms and earthworms who would otherwise be sitting around

Professor Rot says: Composting gives you the chance to look as if you know what you’re doing even if you don’t. That’s okay, the little bacterial critters in your compost bin will cover for you!

Using Finished Compost

Ideally, finished compost is dark brown or black (almost like bagged potting soil), crumbly-textured, and has a rich earthy smell. But realistically, there is no exact point at which compost is “finished.”



Many gardeners choose to use compost that is not fully decomposed. They don't mind if there are still recognizable bits of leaves, minute twigs, straw, hay, and the like. They know it will finish decaying in the soil in their yard or garden.

However, if you intend to use your compost in seed-starting mixes, houseplants, or to cover seed rows, it's best that it is well-rotted and possibly screened. Otherwise delicate plant roots can be attacked by microbes if the roots touch any unfinished compost.

4 GREAT USES

Moisture-holding Mulch

Spread around garden plants, shrubs, and trees. Apply 2-3 inches (5-7cm) on surface

Soil Amendment

Dig in 2-4 inches (5-10cm) per year in the Spring or at planting time. Vegetables, flowers, (everything!) love compost as it releases its nutrients over a 1-2 year period

Compost Tea

Spread around garden plants, shrubs, and trees. Apply 2-3 inches (5-7cm) on surface

Lawn Top-dressing

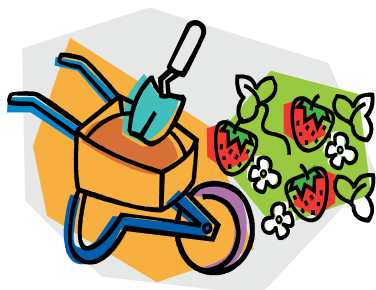
Apply about 1-3 inches (2.5-7cm), raked into lawn

Uses for Well-finished or Screened Compost

In seed-starting mixes (can be pasteurized)

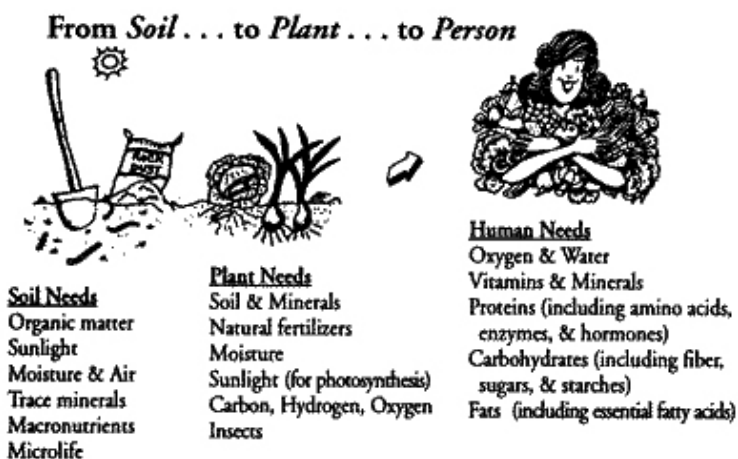
Mixed with potting soil for houseplants (1 part compost, 2 parts potting soil)

To cover seed rows in garden (or mix 1:1 with vermiculite)



Compost: Key to Nutrition

Who would think that there is a link between well-made compost and nutrition? But there is! And every gardener who grows their own fruits and vegetables attest to a vitality that is indescribable. Why? Nutrient-rich compost enriches plants. Soil and compost, in a sense, are at the bottom of the food chain, and humans are at the top. But don't kid yourself — You are literally what you eat!



Make the Nutrition Connection!

There are 23 elements needed for human health that come from healthy soil. These elements are converted by plants (along with carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen) into food nutrients such as amino acids, carbohydrates, essential fats, vitamins, minerals, enzymes, and fiber. A deficiency of even one of the 23 elements in our food will eventually lead to health problems in our body.

When plants are grown properly in nutrient-rich soil, their absorption of these 23 mineral nutrients can be maximized, boosting the nutrition of the food. In turn, as we ingest the nutrients (i.e. minerals and vitamins) in food, our bodies use them in thousands of enzymes. Enzymes drive our body's huge engine of metabolism and all the vital functions that keep us alive. Are you still with us? Deficiencies of key mineral nutrients in the soil prevent those nutrients from being drawn up by the plants and passed on to us via the food we eat. This can lead to a lowering of enzymes in our bodies and less than optimal health. So, keep adding that compost to your garden — it's good for the soil and you!

Composting Systems

The cheapest way to compost is to throw your waste into an open-air bin constructed of wood pallets, wire, brick blocks, or other scrap materials. Many cities, however, require quality covered compost bins. A commercial grade composter, therefore, is an excellent way to compost if you desire not to build your own bin.

**Professor
Rot says . . .**



“Plan your
system around the

4 Rules of Composting:

- Right Ingredients
- Air circulation
- Consistent Moisture
- Adequate Volume”

Before Creating a System, ask . . .

How much waste do I throw away?

Do I compost food scraps?

Do I want my bin to be tidy and easy to get to?

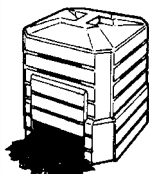
Will the bin be the right size for my needs?

Is there room in my yard to increase the size of my system in the future?

Does the bin have a lid and air vents? Can it keep rodents and pests out?

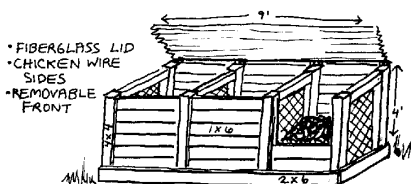
Can I easily remove finished compost?

One Bin System



Most compost bins today are manufactured from high quality recycled plastic resin. You can also make your own. **Look for these features:** portability, lid and air vents, scavenger resistance, holds heat well, adequate volume, and a bottom door to shovel ingredients near your bin.

Multi-Bin System



The perfect system if you have a lot of waste. Make it yourself (shown above) or buy two or more bins! Compost can be made in one bin, then in another bin when more ingredients are available. By this time, the first bin will be done!



Tumbler

Expensive and small. However, the consistent rotating of a batch pile both aerates and heats contents to a fast, finished compost in as little as 3 weeks!

Wire or Plastic Collector

Inexpensive way to compost or use as a holding bin. Field fencing, rabbit wire, or manufactured plastic with holes is sturdy. Pile heats slowly and may attract rodents and pests. Keep covered with a lid; when compost is finished, remove collector!



“Going Natural”

It is possible that not all your yard waste can be recycled in a compost bin — you may have too much or your bin is already full and in use. Important alternatives (if allowed in your municipality) can be characterized as “natural systems” — letting raw nature help out. These techniques especially increase worm life in your soil — that’s good, real good!



Soil Incorporation

Also called trench composting. The basic premise is simple: **BURY YOUR WASTE!!** This can be done for kitchen waste or other yard debris. Just dig a trench 10-12” (25-30cm) deep, throw in items, chop and mix with soil, then cover with remaining soil. In a few months the rotted materials will have been incorporated into the soil and you can plant above them.

Sheet Composting

This mulching technique is useful for large amounts of leaves, clippings, etc. (No food wastes) Simply lay them down throughout the garden, or rototill them into the soil (late autumn is best or at least 2 months before planting time).

Mulching is critical in helping to retain soil moisture, and in erosion and/or weed control.

Grasscycling

Definitely a worthy alternative to composting grass clippings. See [How to Compost Grass Clippings](#), p. 23, for more information.

Covered Wind Row

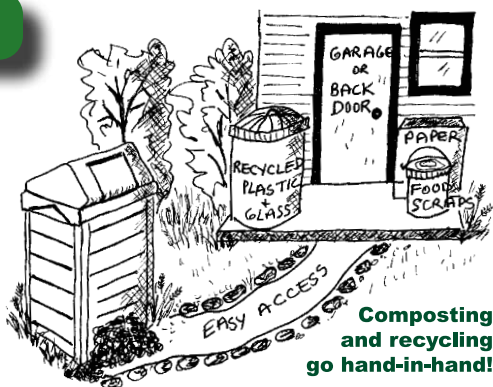
This heap-like pile is generally long, narrow, and high (up to 4-ft [1.2m] or higher). It is very simply layered as waste materials come available and kept covered with plastic. Decomposition occurs within its own time and speed but eventually happens.

If disposing of food scraps in this pile, make sure they are covered or buried within it.

Siting Your Compost Area

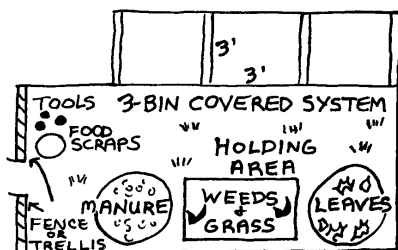
“Going Natural”

- Place your compost bin (and holding bin, if desired) near your back door, or further in the yard by a fence or vegetable garden
- It is okay for your recycling and composting areas to be near each other
- Store a lidded food scrap bucket nearby that you can later add
- Create a pathway to your bin or compost area, if desired
- Ensure that a water spigot or hose is near bin
- Keep compost turner tool handy!



Make Room!

- Create space for more than one compost bin just in case you expand your system
- Plan room for one or more holding bins to stockpile raw materials (very important!)
- Visually separate your compost system, if desired, from the garden or favorite sitting areas; even from a nosey neighbor
- Keep your compost area neat & tidy. Plant flowers & shrubs nearby to beautify it



For the ambitious composter with a large yard — a multi-bin system with a holding area for stockpiling is ideal

