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HOME GROWN FACTS

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Compost or Pasta??

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If you've lived in the Rome and Utica area for awhile, the word "Lasagna" conjures up a picture of a luscious Italian meal. You probably visualize layers of ricotta cheese, then great wavy noodles, then another layer of mozzarella, a meat sauce, then another wavy noodle, and it just keeps going until you have this neat stack of a superb pasta dish.

So imagine my surprise, when I heard about lasagna that won't add calories, but will add great tasting food for my garden. Just follow the recipe below and you can have a great "meal" for your flowers and vegetables. So let's start with some of the ingredients you will need:

Kitchen Items (Nitrogen-Rich):

- Vegetable peels and seeds
- Egg shells
- Fruit peels and seeds
- Nut shells
- Coffee grounds
- Any other vegetable or fruit scrap

Note: Do not add meat scraps, bones, dairy products, oils, or fat. They may attract pesky animals. Also keep out the weeds with seed heads.

Yard or Garden Items (Carbon-Rich):

- Hay or straw
- Wood chips
- Garden waste
- Leaves
- Manure from herbivores
- Shredded paper
- Sawdust

Directions:

- The first thing you need to do is get your "pan" ready for making your "lasagna."
- You can start with a simple "pan" measuring about 3 feet by 3 feet. Now start the layering.

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- The bottom layer should be a loose layer of twigs and branches. This layer will help to keep air moving to the center of the pile—providing oxygen to your mixture.
- Next start your brown layer. This will be some of the items from your yard and garden list such as dried leaves, woodchips, saw dust. The brown layers will help to balance the moisture. Also most of these items are rich in carbon which is a critical food source to the decomposition organisms.
- Next add your green layer. The green layer will be comprised of those kitchen compost items above. (I usually keep mine for about 1 week before I add it to my mixture.) Whenever possible, make sure your green items are chopped up. The smaller the pieces the faster they will decompose. These green items are Nitrogen-rich, supplying another critical food source for the decomposers. One of the best ways to add your green layer is to make a little bowl out of the browns. Once you add the greens, cover them up with the browns. I think of the green layer as the noodle since the ratio of the brown to green should be about 3:1, and the green layer should be only 1-2 inches thick. With this layering technique it is not necessary to turn the compost. However, turning will speed up the decomposition. You can use a tool such as a garden spade or pitch fork, to turn the mixture.

“Baking time” is not nearly as exact as baking a regular lasagna. The length of time it takes to make compost depends on many factors such as weather, the size of your bin, the type of materials and whether or not you decide to turn the mixture. Too much moisture or too little moisture will slow your decomposition down.

The finished compost will occur at the bottom of the bin first. You can then harvest this compost and spread it on your garden. If you completed your “recipe” correctly your compost will be dark, crumbly and an earthy-smelling organic matter.



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Updated 2012