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COMPOST TIPS & TRICKS!

Composting is a natural process in which small bacteria and other microbes convert yard waste, such as leaves and grass clippings, into a useful organic soil amendment. Compost has been used for centuries to improve the physical condition of soil and add nutrients needed for plant growth. Incorporating compost into light, sandy soil helps it retain moisture and nutrients, while adding it to heavy soil can improve drainage.

Several conditions have to be met to produce compost efficiently from yard waste. The microbes responsible for decomposition need oxygen, water, and nitrogen. Particle size also affects efficiency—the smaller the waste pieces, the more rapidly they will break down. Conversely, the larger the waste pieces, the slower they will break down. So whatever you can do to break down the pieces beforehand will speed up the process.

TIP #1 – LOCATING YOUR COMPOST PILE

Place your composter or compost pile somewhere that's convenient for you—close to where it will be used, but not so close so that it interferes with yard activities or offends your neighbors. A compost pile works best where it is somewhat protected from drying winds, yet receives partial sunlight to help heat it.

TIP #2 – COMPOSTABLE MATERIAL

Many organic materials besides grass and leaves can be composted: non-woody shrub trimmings or twigs less than 1/4 inch in diameter, faded flowers, weeds, leftover plants, lake plants, straw, coffee grounds and filters, eggshells, hair (untreated), fruit and vegetable scraps, and shredded newspaper (black and white print only).

This organic material (also called green material

by some) should ideally be matched with the same amount of brown material such as woodchips, hay, twigs, wood ashes, dried-out-leaves and dried-out clippings.

The No. 1 Rule of Composting - the smaller the material, the more quickly it will compost! So it pays to run the material through a shredder, or to run your lawn mower over it before composting. Wet leaves take a longer time to decompose, but if they are dried out first, mixed with kitchen waste and then put into the composter, their decomposition will accelerate.

TIP #3 – WHAT CAN'T BE COMPOSTED?

Some things should NOT be composted, including pet feces, meat, bones, grease, whole eggs, and dairy products. Badly diseased or insect-infested plants and weeds that are loaded with seed may not heat up enough to be rendered harmless. Inorganic materials such as plastic, metal, glass, rubber and stone also will not compost.

PILE PREPARATION TRICKS

Your compost pile should be built in layers. For best results, follow these steps:

- ❶ Gather up all of the compostable kitchen waste (green material) you can find.
- ❷ At the bottom of the composter (if it doesn't have a screen) or composter pile, place a layer of twigs or sticks about 3" to 4" high. This will allow air to circulate at the bottom of the pile which will in turn help to prevent odors.
- ❸ Begin by placing 8" to 10" of leaves, grass, or plant trimmings onto the twigs, and then cover with a layer of brown material. The kitchen waste and brown material can be mixed together if desired. Water to the point of being moist, but not soggy.

