WHAT IS COMPOSTING AND WHY DO IT?

Composting is nature’s way to recycle. It is the controlled, natural decomposition of organic matter. Microorganisms and macroorganisms break down organic materials into compost, or humus, a nutrient-rich soil amendment that improves the health and efficiency of your garden ecosystem from the ground up.

WHAT GOES IN THE COMPOST PILE?

**PASSIVE COMPOSTING**

Less hands-on method, minimal turning, and involves adding water less frequently. The pile won’t generate as much heat and may dry out at times, so the materials won’t decompose as quickly, and sweet spots may not be killed.

**ACTIVE COMPOSTING**

Engaged effort, frequent maintenance (turning the pile on a regular basis and maintaining optimal moisture and temperature levels). This method builds hot spots and produces finished compost in the shortest period of time.

**VERMICOMPOSTING**

Involves feeding red worms and involves turning the pile on a regular basis and maintaining optimal moisture and temperature levels. This method builds hot spots and produces finished compost in the shortest period of time.

COMPOSTING IN STYLE

These are different styles of composting. Some require more time and effort, while others require less. Many composters find that they can adapt to different styles depending on what type of composting, or by setting up multiple bin systems to have several stages of decomposition occurring simultaneously. Which style of composting best fits your needs and lifestyle?

PASSIVE COMPOSTING

Compost bin style that will help to keep your compost pile neat and tidy, deter rodent entry, and retain heat and moisture during decomposition. Compost bins kept in the shade are less likely to require frequent watering. Black bins painted on soil to invite beneficial decomposers into the pile.

ACTIVE COMPOSTING

Bin style that is more engaged, requires more frequent maintenance and involves turning the pile on a regular basis and maintaining optimal moisture and temperature levels.

VERMICOMPOSTING

Bins that are more engaged and easy way to recycle your food scraps. It uses less space than traditional composting, and can be done in an indoor setting. The method produces worm castings, another nutrient-rich soil amendment.

COMPOSTING BASICS

Always use high quality ingredients, and an understanding of the process. All you need to get started is a little bit of space, the basic ingredients, and an understanding of the process. Composting can be practiced almost anywhere...

COMPOST BINS

A compost bin will help to keep your compost pile neat and tidy, deter rodent entry, and retain heat and moisture during decomposition. Compost bins kept in the shade are less likely to require frequent watering. Black bins painted on soil to invite beneficial decomposers into the pile.

HOMEMADE BINS

Homemade bins can be easily constructed out of wood, wire mesh, and other materials found around the home. To get a set of plans for building your own traditional backyard bin or worm bin visit solanacenter.org/ciy.

PURCHASED BINS

Purchased bins come in a variety of styles. They can be purchased at nurseries and garden centers, or ordered directly from the manufacturer. To see examples of the different types of composting bins, visit one of the Composting Demonstration Gardens around the County. For a list of sites, visit solanacenter.org/ciy.

COMPOST BINS

A handful of compost contains more decomposer organisms than there are people on the planet. Numerous tiny creatures are responsible for making the whole composting process happen.

MICROORGANISMS (like bacteria and fungi) do the majority of decomposition work. Although too small to see, they are on everything you throw into the compost pile.

MACROORGANISMS (like worms, earthworms, and grubs) are large enough to see. They usually enter the compost pile from the surrounding landscape in the later stages of decomposition.

WATER helps ensure efficient processing of organic matter. Ideally, the pile is kept moist but not soggy. Too much water can produce anaerobic conditions.

AIR is essential for a sweet, earthy-smelling compost pile. Having your compost pile regularly aerated will help to inhibit the growth of opportunistic anaerobic bacteria, and will result in better decomposition.

COMPOSTING VERMICOMPOSTING

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VERMICOMPOST BASICS

Worms used for composting are different than the large earthworms commonly found burrowing in San Diego backyards. Red worms are smaller, and are well-adapted to the conditions inside a vermicompost bin. Red worms are carnivorous; they eat and reproduce rapidly. Vermicompost is a mixture of worm castings and decomposed or unfinished material that can be used as a soil amendment, mulch, or for improving potting soil. Vermicompost is different from compost in the way that the materials are processed and used. While compost is a mixture of worm castings and decomposed or unfinished material that can be used as a soil amendment, mulch, or for improving potting soil, vermiculture is a more specific process that involves Earthworms.colony. Vermicomposting utilizes the natural eating and reproduction habits of the worms to create a humus-like compost, which is easier to use compared to traditional compost and decreases the costs involved with making it.

COMPOSTING COMES TO A SCREECHING STOP!

Don’t fret! Composting is a very forgiving process, and any problems that arise can be easily corrected.

If your bin is not producing compost, there are a few things you can do to get it back on track.

1. Check the moisture levels in your bin. The moisture content is a key factor in successful composting. Make sure the bin is neither too wet nor too dry.

2. Check your bedding. The bedding should be damp, not wet or dry. If it is too dry, add water. If it is too wet, remove excess water and add more bedding.

3. Check your food scraps. Are they being added in the correct amounts and frequencies? Are they being added in the correct proportions? Are they being mixed regularly?

4. Check your temperature. The ideal temperature for composting is between 130°F and 150°F. If the temperature is too high or too low, adjust the proportions of your food scraps or add more bedding.

5. Check your ventilation. Make sure there is enough air circulation in your bin to prevent anaerobic conditions.

6. Check your worms. Make sure you have enough active worms to maintain a healthy composting process.

7. Check your pH levels. The pH of your compost should be between 6.5 and 7.5. If it is too high or too low, amend your compost with additional bedding or food scraps.

If you follow these steps, your composting process should get back on track in no time! If you continue to have problems, don’t hesitate to contact your local composting organization for further assistance.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Composting is best learned by doing. With experience, you will learn what works best for you. For further exploration...

Expanded Composting and Vermicomposting Info, 2022. www.solanacenter.org/ciy

Call the Hotline

(619) 690-1111

Expanded Composting and Vermicomposting Info, 2022. www.solanacenter.org/ciy

Visit our Online Research Page

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