

COMPOSTING - The Natural Way

Composting is Nature's way of recycling. Composting decomposes and transforms organic material into a soil-like product called humus (pronounced "hue-mous"). Food scraps, leaves and yard trimmings, paper, wood, manures, and the remains of agricultural crops are excellent organic materials which can be composted.

Composting is an important way to recycle -- both at home and at work, where organic material is used and waste is created. It is estimated that about 50 percent of the **total waste stream** could be **composted!** Composting not only helps to reduce the amount of waste going to landfills, it produces a valuable soil amendment which can improve the texture and fertility of the soil.

The composting process uses micro-organisms such as bacteria and fungi to break down the organic materials. For the process to work best, it is important that the micro-organisms have a continuous supply of food (i.e. organics), water and oxygen. As well, managing the temperature of the composting material is important to make the process work.

It is also important to give the micro-organisms a "balanced diet". Although most organic materials provide all of the nutrients for the micro-organisms to grow, they grow best with certain levels of carbon (C) and nitrogen (N). Paper, leaves and wood are high in carbon while grass clippings and vegetable scraps are high in nitrogen. Combining the correct "mix" of carbon and nitrogen materials in the composting "recipe" helps to get the best results.

While Composting occurs naturally, the process can happen faster with the help of different systems... each designed to manage various types and quantities of organic material.

Backyard, on-site, and centralized composting systems are being set up across Canada to recycle our organics. With these systems, each of us has the ability to contribute to waste diversion and the creation of a valuable soil amendment.

The Systems

Backyard Composting

This involves the set up and ongoing management of a composting unit at home. A backyard composter is a simple way for each of us to manage the organic wastes which we generate. To get the best results, it is important to make sure that the right types and amounts of organics are used and that the composting process is properly maintained. Backyard composting experts are available, through your local municipality, to help explain the process and provide helpful suggestions. Whether with the use of a "build your own" unit or a commercial model, home composting avoids collection costs and creates an excellent soil conditioner for home gardening and landscaping.

On-Site Composting

This is the on-site management of organic waste generated by a group of people, such as in an apartment complex, office building or hospital. On-site composting avoids the costs associated with the transportation of organics. As with other systems, the establishment of efficient and effective collection as well as the maintenance of the composter are important to ensure that the process

runs

effectively.

Centralized Composting

This involves the collection and transportation of large amounts of organic materials to a special facility where it is prepared and processed into compost. These facilities can compost most of the organic wastes generated in a community. They are designed to manage large volumes of a wide range of organic materials. Restaurants, grocery stores, and residential communities are recycling their organics with the help of centralized composting. Collection methods, processing requirements and the end use for the finished compost are all taken into account in the facility's design. The separation of organic materials from other recyclables and wastes will minimize contamination. As well, the ongoing implementation of good operating procedures ensures the production of high-quality compost.

The Bottom Line

When the composting process is complete, regardless of the system used, the finished product is a valuable soil amendment. Rich in organic matter, finished compost can help improve soil texture and fertility. It has many applications including home gardening, landscaping, use in potting soil for the horticultural industry and in agriculture. Composting truly is Nature's way of recycling!