

COMPOST

NOTES

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Dear Composters

Dear Composters:

This past summer I attended a food scrap forum at Ithaca College that highlighted a number of programs aimed at reducing food waste, from reducing serving sizes to composting food scraps. In the U.S. we produce obscene amounts of food waste – we’ve gotten so used to making large amounts of food and tossing out the leftovers it’s become a habit. I have to admit this habit has made its way into my own household. Because we compost our food scraps it was easy to ignore the amount we throw out, but the primary goal should be to make less waste. So our challenge is to make fewer trips to the compost pile with food scraps – I wonder if my 10 year old son will go along with this one?

We have a couple of composting workshops planned for October, and we hope you can join us for one of them. Enjoy the autumn season.

Cheers,

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Ask Dr. Compost

“Will compost starter help me make compost faster?”

Products marketed as compost “starters”, “activators”, “accelerators” and “inoculants” are additives that are supposed to hasten the breakdown of the organic waste in your compost bin. The products marketed as inoculants contain inactive bacteria and/or fungi. This is supposed to provide a big boost of microorganisms. However, the raw materials in your compost already contain plenty of bacteria and fungi that can reproduce like gang busters. One single bacterium has the potential to produce about 5 billion offspring in just 12 hours according to the book *Teaming with Microbes: A Gardener’s Guide to the Soil Food Web*. So don’t waste your money on inoculants, just let nature do it.

Some compost additives provide extra nitrogen. These products can help speed up decomposition if the material in your pile or bin has a high carbon to nitrogen ratio (e.g. leaves). Compost additives tend to be expensive however, so if you want to add nitrogen, simply add grass clippings, fruit/vegetable scraps or coffee grounds. If you don’t have enough of these materials and you are determined to add nitrogen, organic sources of nitrogen like alfalfa meal, blood meal, or cotton seed meal are cheaper options than commercial compost additives.

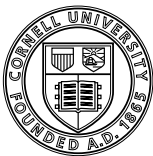
Composting the Tough Stuff

Soon many vegetable plants and annual flowers will be ready for the compost pile or bin. However, if you just toss them in they can make turning the compost difficult. The tough stems of annual flowers and tomatoes, as well as vines from plants like pumpkins and beans break down very slowly. If you don’t chop the stems of these plants up into more manageable sizes they will bind a pitch fork or compost turning tool so thoroughly the Incredible Hulk couldn’t lift it. There are several options for dealing with this dilemma. If you are not in a hurry place these plants in a dedicated pile or bin and just let them decompose slowly. Eventually they will decompose enough so you can turn the pile if you wish. Expect this method to take at least two years. If you’re the ambitious type you can lay the vines and stems on an old piece of plywood and chop them with a very sharp spade, a long handled ice scrapper, or machete. Another approach is to use a string trimmer to shred the plants right in the garden. If you do this you can collect the shredded plants for composting in a bin or pile, or you can let them decompose on top of the garden soil.



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Innovative Home Composting Workshop October 2nd

If you've mastered the basics of home composting and want to learn more this workshop is for you. On October 2nd at 6:30 p.m. we'll delve into topics such as hot composting, dealing with difficult materials, pest resistant bins, and making/using compost tea. Plenty of time will be set aside to allow participants to ask questions and share their own composting "tricks of the trade". The workshop is free, but please call (607) 584-9966 to register.

Worm Composting Workshop October 16th

A worm composting workshop for Broome County residents will be held on Thursday, October 16th at 6:30 p.m. Participants will receive a worm container made from a plastic tote bin, complete with bedding and some starter worms (one bin per household). You must attend the workshop to receive a bin. There is no charge for the workshop, but space is limited and registration is required. Please call (607) 584-9966 to register.

Upcoming Events



September 22, 6:30 p.m. Home Grown Heroes: Canning & Preserving

Registration required, please call (607) 584-9966.

September 23, 6 p.m. The Science of Saving Seeds

\$7 per person, Registration required, please call (607) 584-9966.

September 27, 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Family Forestry Field Day

\$15 for 1st family member, \$5 each additional member. Registration required, held at Cook Park, Greene, NY. Please call (607) 584-5013.

October 2, 6:30 p.m. Innovative Home Composting

Registration required, see details above.

October 16, 6:30 p.m. Worm Composting Workshop

Registration required, see details above.

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