

# grow

**"TRUTH IS THE STRONG COMPOST IN WHICH BEAUTY MAY SOMETIMES GERMINATE"** — Christopher Morley

## TURNING OVER AN OLD LEAF

RECYCLE YARD WASTE AND KITCHEN CAST-OFFS BY COMPOSTING

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Composting is the ultimate in nature's recycling. It's a natural occurrence in which organic matter such as leaves, grass clippings, vegetable peelings, coffee grounds and even unusual items like saw dust and newspaper are broken down into a simpler form and used to enrich garden soil.

Composting can be done on a large or small scale to fit each individual's needs. Even a small yard or garden produces



enough organic material to make composting a possibility.

Want to try it out? Here are a few basic questions and answers.

**IS COMPOST THE SAME AS FERTILIZER?**

No. It is considered an addendum, a material that conditions and improves soil quality.

**HOW DOES COMPOSTING WORK?**

Bacteria carry on the job of breaking down recognizable plant matter into the simpler chemical components that we call compost. By concentrating organic debris into one place — a compost pile — and providing enough air and moisture, we encourage bacteria to feed at a higher rate of speed than what would happen naturally in the environment.

Bacteria are living organisms and, just like animal cells, they need food, water and oxygen. They feed on the compost pile, using the nutrients in the compost for energy and releasing carbon dioxide and oxygen. As a by-product, they also produce heat. Compost piles can be seen steaming as this heat is released.

**HOW DO I GET STARTED?**

Find a place, preferably out of direct sun, where garden wastes can be accumulated. My first compost "bin" was heavy plastic fencing wrapped around four wooden stakes with one side that could open. This was easy to put up and easy to move.

Larger, more permanent composting sites can be made out of cement blocks or salvaged wood pallets. It is best to have



**You can buy commercially bagged compost or make it at home using kitchen and yard waste.**

one side open so you can turn your pile with a pitchfork or spading fork.

Turning the pile adds air spaces, releases some of the heat and allows you to see if the material is moist. If the pile is too dry, the bacteria cannot work. A properly working pile should not smell bad, only earthy.

**For a printable pamphlet on the basics of home composting go to [cwmi.css.cornell.edu/compostbrochure.pdf](http://cwmi.css.cornell.edu/compostbrochure.pdf).**

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