

COMPOSTING

at a glance...

Composting is . . .

the oldest method for recovering resources through recycling. It is the natural process by which organic matter decays into a dark, rich and crumbly substance called humus, which makes an excellent soil conditioner.

Composting can be done on an individual basis in your backyard.

Composting is an environmentally sound and practical method of turning "refuse" into a valuable resource.

The Advantages

Composting benefits both the environment and the community. It reduces the amount of solid waste sent to landfills and can help reduce the cost of disposing of solid waste.

Using compost is a time-honored tradition among home gardeners because it contains vital nutrients for plants. Adding compost can improve the quality of soil and increase water retention.

The result is healthier plants and savings from decreased water consumption.



The Process

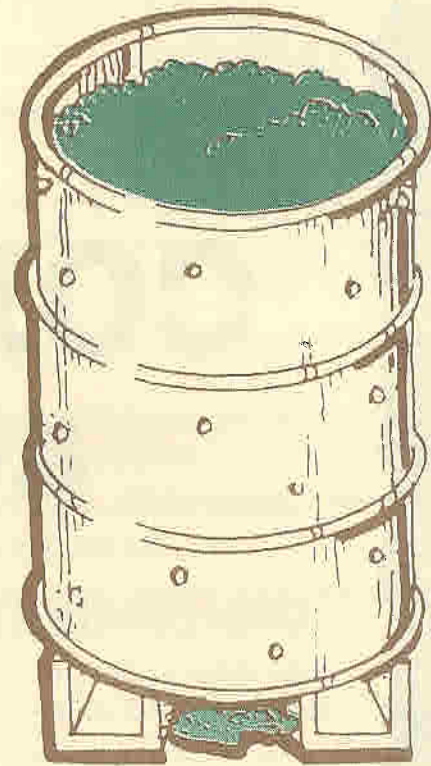
Composting speeds natural decomposition under semi-controlled conditions. Microorganisms feed on organic materials and churn out humus, a process requiring moisture and oxygen. As microbes work, their activity causes temperatures within the pile to rise to as much as 160° F, which speeds the process along and kills many disease organisms and weed seeds.

Backyard Composting Workshop

Now that you understand the process and the benefits of composting, you'll certainly want to start a pile for yourself. Periodically the University of Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service will present a workshop entitled "Composting in Your Back Yard". Watch your local newspaper for the date and location of these future workshops.

For more information, call the Cooperative Extension Service at 244-3242.

On Moloka'i, call 567-6834.



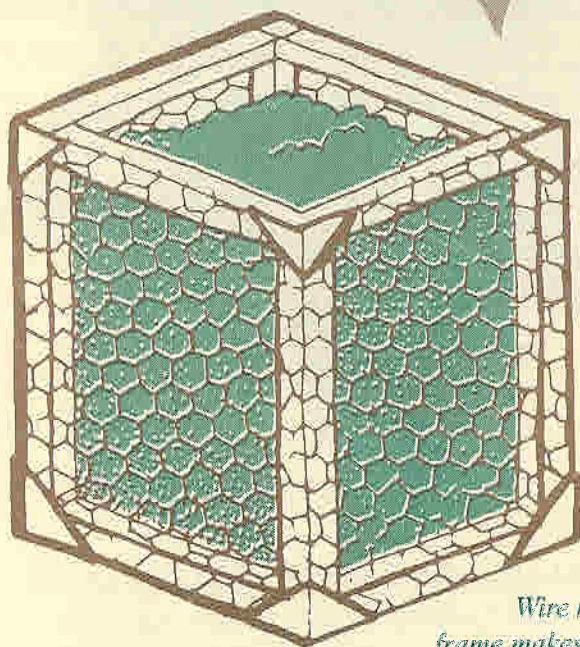
Cut the bottom out of a 55 gallon drum and elevate on cinder blocks for easy access to finished compost. Drilling many holes assists in aeration.

Your Own Backyard Project

Anytime of the year is the right time to begin a compost pile. A holding bin will provide an easy way to contain your compost pile. The size of your holding bin will depend on specific needs. For most people, a 5' long by 4' wide by 3' high bin should suffice.

A simple bin can be built at a relatively low cost using chicken wire, scrap wood or cinder blocks. Place your compost bin in a convenient location and add grass clippings and leaves as they collect. To assist the decay process, we recommend layering with top soil.

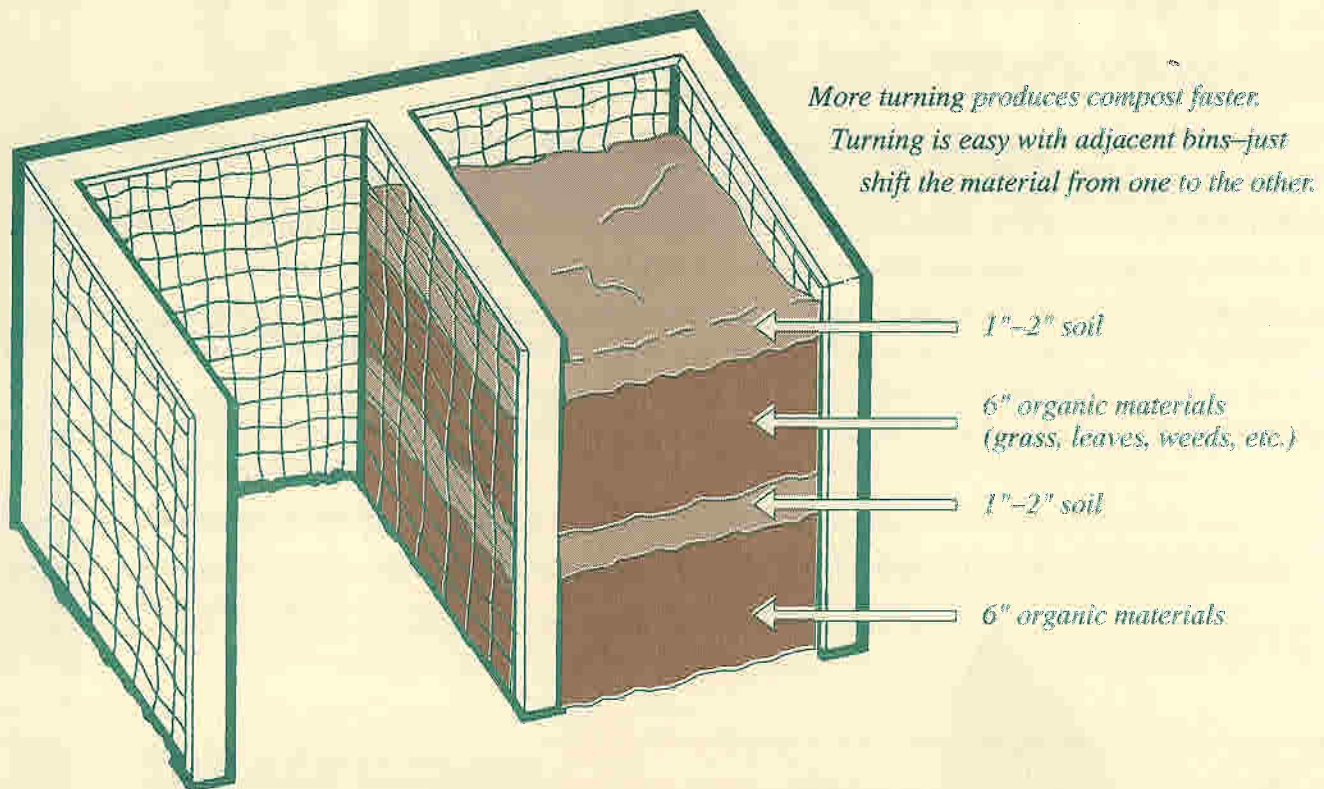
Aerate the pile by turning every month or so with a shovel or pitch fork. This provides ventilation and shifts materials from the outer edges of the pile to the center, where they are better able to be heated and to break down. If needed, wet the pile thoroughly, but not to the point of soaking. This method will produce usable compost in from six month to two years.



Wire mesh stretched on a wooden frame makes an effective bin.

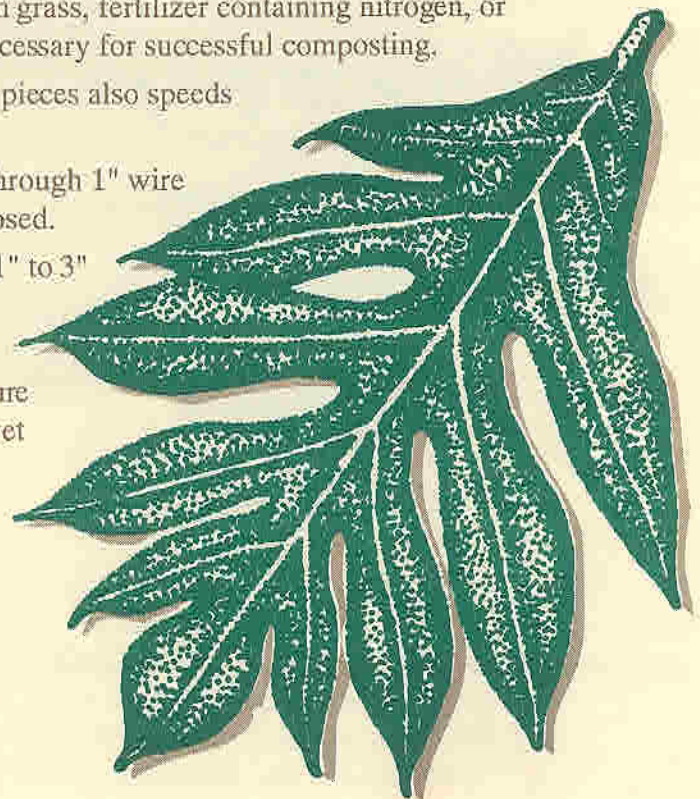
A quicker system calls for more turning, and one or two adjacent bins come in handy for this—just shift the compost from one bin to the another. Alternate a 6" layer of compostable yard wastes with a 1" layer of garden soil. Repeat until the bin is almost full, wetting each layer thoroughly. Within a week, the center of the pile should be hot. Every few days, turn the pile by shifting its contents into the adjacent bin.

This method will produce usable compost in just a few months. When the material is uniform in color and texture and crumbly to the touch, you're ready to start gardening with your home-made compost.



Composting Hints to Remember

- Nitrogen is essential to the composting process. Adding fresh grass, fertilizer containing nitrogen, or manure to leaves assists in rapid decomposition, but is not necessary for successful composting.
- Shredding or chopping materials to be composted into small pieces also speeds up the decay process.
- Finished compost may be easier to use if it is first screened through 1" wire mesh to eliminate materials that are not completely decomposed.
- Compost should be applied to soil surface in layers of from 1" to 3" in thickness. Then mix it thoroughly into the soil of vegetable gardens and flower beds before planting.
- Covering the compost pile with plastic can help retain moisture and heat. This will also protect the pile from becoming too wet when it rains, which may deplete the material of nitrogen.
- Frequent turning is not recommended in cool weather because it will allow too much heat to escape.
- A pile should be turned *immediately* if ammonia or offensive odors are detected.



Continued . . .

Composting Hints continued . . .

- Allowing proper time is important. Compost that is not fully decomposed may cause nitrogen starvation when used on plants.
- You may also include vegetable kitchen wastes in your compost pile. These must be completely covered by several inches of yard waste or soil. Be sure not to include any meat products, grease, or cheese so that rodents and other pests will not be attracted to your yard!

Variations on the Composting Theme

Soil Incorporation. Using a posthole digger to bury leaves or yard wastes is an easy way to compost them. This should be done in an inactive area of the garden to give the materials time to decompose.

Mulching. Woody yard wastes, grass clippings and leaves may be used as mulch, which is spread over the surface of soil to suppress weed growth. Do not mix green grass clippings into the soil.

Grass Clippings left on the lawn can actually help you maintain a vigorous, more durable lawn. You can safely leave clippings on your lawn so long as they are not excessively long or weedy.

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Don't throw away a good thing . . . COMPOST!