

LEARNING TO COMPOST

Building and maintaining a compost pile is the surest, easiest way to become a better gardener. Not only will you be producing the best possible food for your garden, but by watching leaves, eggshells, orange rinds, and grass clippings become transformed into rich compost filled with earthworms and other soil creatures, you'll be learning what healthy soil is all about.

This week our students have learned all about compost. A specialist from Ambisousa, the local recycling center and the landfill came to our school to teach students all about it and then they had the opportunity to start using our composters.

They have learned that compost is a rich and crumbly blend of partially decomposed organic material that does wonderful things for your garden and more important it has great benefits to the environment, such as:

- being a soil conditioner, since it creates rich humus for your lawn and garden. This adds nutrients to your plants and helps retain soil moisture. They don't call it "black gold" for nothing.;
- divert as much as 30% of household waste away from the garbage can,
- helps aerate the soil, break down organic materials for plant use, and ward off plant disease;
- offers a natural alternative to chemical fertilizers when applied to lawns and garden beds
- and reduces landfill waste

Also important is what you can put into your compost and that will depend somewhat on what kind of composter you have, but some general rules do apply. All compostable materials are either carbon or nitrogen-based, to varying degrees. The secret to a healthy compost pile is to maintain a working balance between these two elements: Carbon/Nitrogen Ratio.

So, Common Compost Ingredients are:

for the Brown layer (High-carbon materials): corncobs and stalks; paper; pine needles; sawdust or wood shavings; straw; vegetable stalks; dry leaves;

for the Green layers (High-nitrogen materials): coffee grounds; eggshells; fruit wastes; grass clippings; feathers or hair; fresh leaves; seaweed; kitchen scraps; fresh weeds; rotted manure; alfalfa meal.

There are also ingredients to avoid putting in our composters:



Do not compost meat, bones, or fish scraps (they will attract pests) unless you are using a composter designed specifically for this purpose. The Green Cone Solar Waste Digester is one good example. Avoid composting perennial weeds or diseased plants, since you might spread weed seeds or diseases when spreading your compost. Don't include pet manures in compost that will be used on food crops. Banana peels, peach peels, and orange rinds may contain pesticide residues and should be kept out of the compost. Black walnut leaves should not be composted. Sawdust may be added to the compost, but should be mixed or scattered thinly to avoid clumping. Be sure sawdust is clean, with no machine oil or chain oil residues from cutting equipment.

Students learned how to compost and how to use a composter and finally the most interesting part of everything: rolling shirt sleeves and starting to use the composter. They have learned new things and had great fun doing it.

