

Composting – turning your garbage into something useful.

What if you could reduce waste around your house, have lush, beautiful, green plants in your garden, know that you were reducing the amount of pollution and helping to keep our aquifer clean, plus extending the life of your local landfill? Sure, you say? Most of us would like to be a part of doing these things; but, how much is it going to cost – right? What if I told you that you could actually save money? The way to achieve all this is so simple; it's composting.

What exactly is composting? Wikipedia Encyclopedia defines it as “the controlled aerobic decomposition of biodegradable organic matter, producing compost.” Basically, compost is taking garbage and making something useful out of it. In addition, compost use can result in a variety of environmental benefits.

Compost can restore soil that has been depleted of nutrients. The composting process aids in the production of valuable micro-organisms which in turn break down organic matter to create humus, which helps soils retain moisture. In today's world, conserving water is essential. Sandy and clay soil types either allow the water to run off or drain through very fast. Adding organic matter (compost) helps to break up the fine clay particles so that, instead of running off; moisture penetrates the soil where your plants can extract it. In sandy soils, water quickly drains through the larger particles, making frequent watering necessary. Adding compost to sandy soil provides a sponge to absorb and retain moisture

Compost has also been shown to keep plant diseases and pests in check. It also helps to reduce or eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers, and promote higher yields of agricultural crops. This is a very important factor because the major cause of pollution to bodies of water is surface water running off yards, streets, paved lots and farm fields. Therefore, composting helps keep our wetlands from becoming polluted by chemical fertilizers and pesticides. By using the compost process, we are actually protecting these precious ecosystems.

In addition, compost helps to cleanup contaminated soil. The composting process has been tested and shows that it absorbs odors and treats some semi volatile and volatile organic compounds, including heating fuels and explosives. The compost process degrades and sometimes even eliminates some preservatives and pesticides in the ground.

The benefits of composting to preserve the life of our landfills are immense. If everyone composted their kitchen scraps, yard waste and paper products, don't you think the landfills would last a lot longer? The result would also be less cost in the maintenance of landfills, saving costs in cleaning up contaminated soils – all of which saves the taxpayers money and adds to the quality of the environment.

So, let's go over some of the benefits of composting again:

- It saves you money by replacing store-bought soil conditioners. (Fertilizers, etc.)
- It helps gardens, lawns and plants grow by improving the fertility of your soil.
- It saves water by helping the soil hold moisture and reducing water runoff.
- It benefits the environment by recycling valuable organic resources, reducing air and water pollution from refuse trucks and runoff and extending the life of our landfills.

So you see, composting is a win-win solution to many of the challenges we face today. If you are interested in learning more and having your own home composter, please call us at (863) 402-6545 and

ask about the Home Composting Workshop on November 29<sup>th</sup>. The workshop will be held at the Agri-Civic Center, conference room 2 from 9a.m. – 12 p.m. The Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District will provide you with a prepared barrel for your home composter. During the workshop, staff will present the benefits of composting and demonstrate how to build a frame for your 55 gallon barrel. We only have 19 prepared barrels, so make sure to call us and reserve yours soon. There will be a small fee of \$15.00 to cover the cost of materials.

When you leave our workshop, you will have a barrel ready to place your kitchen scraps and yard waste in. All you have to do is build the frame and we're going to show you how and give you a list of instructions. You will be on your way to having healthier, greener plants, helping the environment and saving money! We hope to see you there.